鎌池和馬
イラスト
灰村キヨタカ
とある魔術の禁書目録
インデックス
SS2
電撃文庫

Toaru Majutsu no Index - SS2

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Toaru Majutsu no Index SS 2

Kanzaki, who chases after the spirit of jeans cutting; Kamijou Touya, who meets a girl selling weird magical herbs; Number 7, a Level 5 esper with a delicate strength; a man who goes by the name "Misaka", standing in front of a young girl determined to murder others; Shirai, who blew up at a lazy beautician; a gentle man who has not grown accustomed to the title "God of magic"; Kuruwa-chan, a young girl who is in love with Hanzou; a young hacker, who challenges Uiharu; Sunazara Chimitsu, who ogles over a tall and slender beauty; the Misaka Sisters who are deeply engrossed in blood type fortune telling; Sherry, who awakened her senses to something; Kinuhata's movie date (?!) with Hamazura... The characters everyone wants to see again are now active with brand new characters! This is Volume 2 of the SS series that supplements the main series!

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とある魔術の禁書目録SS②

鎌池和馬

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Kamachi Kazuma

This time, it will be different. In the fight of the "Saint Destroyer" (the spiritual tool), they managed to seal a Saint for the first time; the crest of Kanzaki's Kigomi. A simple figure resembling a national flag. The tree symbolizes life and growth, especially the trunk, which is the embodiment of the path of magic evolution. Yet the extending hand there is an imperfect, man made being. That is what the girl's strong desire represents. An expression of change? Crest of Saints? Kanzaki? ...Until the end, the world shall continue to keep growing.

(Products of Dengeki Bunko)

Toaru Majutsu no Index 1~16
Toaru Majutsu no Index SS
Toaru Majutsu no Index SS 2

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

Even though it won't reach the current story in this book, the anime is finally about to be broadcasted. It seems like Himegami, who's more or less nonexistent in the manga, will properly appear, too! (← This is a crucial point.

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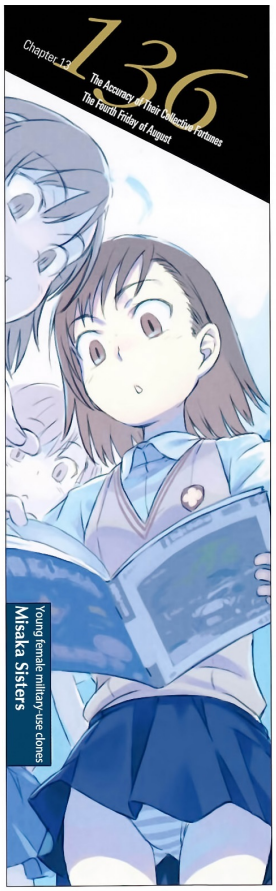
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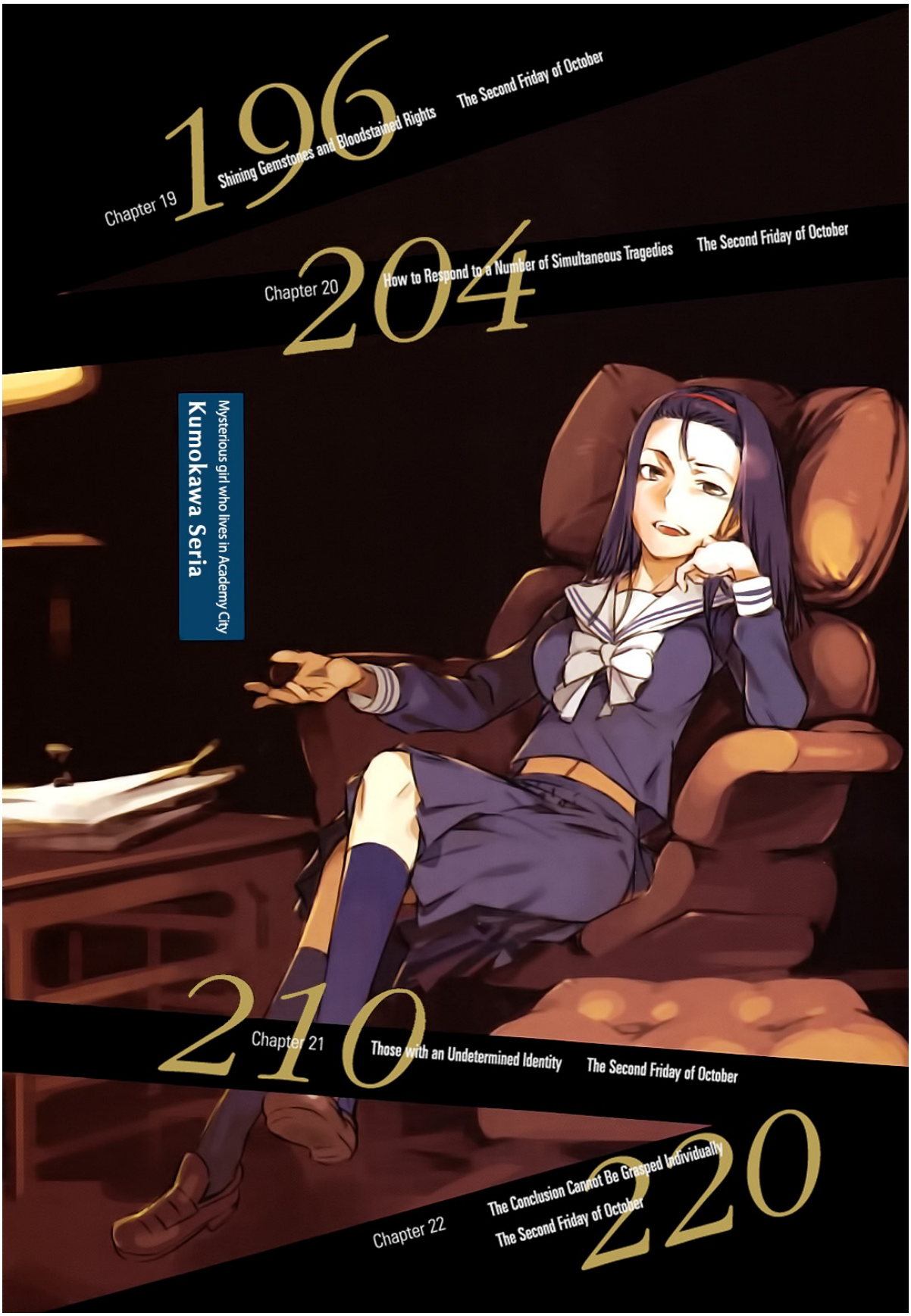


Mysterious girl who lives in Academy City
Kumokawa Seria

Toaru Majutsu no Index - SS2

Chapter 1: Those Who Seek Bundles of Cash and a Battle. The Third Friday of January.

A single station wagon was roaring through Academy City which was created from the western portion of Tokyo. Three boys were onboard. Komaba Ritoku, Hanzou, and Hamazura Shiage. They were all members of a delinquent group known as Skill-Out.

The one gripping the steering wheel, Hamazura, was clearly too young to have a driver's license. But there were two rules they were in violation of that made this seem irrelevant.

First, that station wagon was stolen.

Second, an ATM (they used the heavy machinery to pick it up) was stuck in the station wagon's back seat.

The station wagon the boys were in flew down the road lined with wind turbines and below an airship floating in the blue sky.

"Oh, wow. One of these things has twenty million in it?"

Hanzou's eyes shined as he looked at the ATM with its cracked screen and crushed body. He spoke to Hamazura who was sitting right in front of him in the driver's seat.

"We were right to scout you. We never would've been able to rip out and steal a device reinforced against earthquakes without someone who could operate construction equipment."

"Speaking of which, how did you gather money before?"

"Hm? Steal something easy and get the fuck out of there."

“That’s pretty lame!!”

“Well, dragging someone weak-looking into a back alley and punching them a few times is faster, but, y’see, Leader Komaba won’t let us lay a hand on fragile girls.”

“But this way’s pretty exciting!!” said Hamazura as he and Hanzou laughed unintelligently.

Komaba gave no reaction to having been brought up in the conversation. Hamazura checked in the rear-view mirror and saw the large guy sitting heavily in the back seat like someone on the bench at Koshien.

“What’s with Komaba-san anyway?”

“You saw that thing before, right? There was that bow gun guy who invaded that elementary school at the start of the 3rd term and Leader Komaba sent him flying 5 meters with just his fist. It may seem out of character, but when a little girl is fond of him he gets really shy.”

The shoulders of the gorilla-sized man who would silence a crying child twitched.

“Eh…? Komaba-san’s looking at an online store on that PDA, right? He stopped and has been staring at an XL-sized Santa outfit and white beard set for almost 10 minutes now.”

His shoulders twitched even more.

“Yeah, I remember what she said, leader. She asked if Santa Claus really existed, right? So is a delinquent Santa gonna be visiting her at the end of the year!?”

As the two idiots laughed uproariously at that, Komaba suddenly squeezed the PDA in his hands as if he were wringing out a cloth.

“Fgaaaaaaaahhhhhh!!”

“E-eee!? Leader Komaba’s shyness is making him go crazy!!”

Komaba wasn’t operating the steering wheel, but the station wagon still slid to

the side unnaturally.

“Hey, Hamazura. Is there a specific way to open up an ATM?” Hanzou asked while they were still heading back to their hideout in the station wagon.

“Oh, I’ll take it apart. It’s got a capsule in the safe so it can’t be opened improperly.”

“A capsule?”

“It’s got fluorescent paint in it. If you open it in the wrong way, it makes all the bills unusable. So don’t touch it until we’re back to the hideout.”

But just as Hamazura finished giving his warning…

“…Hamazura. What do you think this is…?”

“Hey, Komaba-san!! Just 5 seconds ago, I told you not to to—Wait, what?”

Hamazura looked toward the back seat via the rear-view mirror and then stopped moving.

Held in Komaba Ritoku’s thick fingers was a long, narrow stick similar to a USB drive.

Hamazura’s face paled and he whispered to Komaba.

“…It looks like a…GPS transmitter…”

As soon as he did, a shrill siren rang out from behind them. The red lights made it unnecessary to check. It was a high-speed sports car driven by Anti-Skill, the keepers of the peace in the city.

And in the middle of the road about 100 meters ahead was a large cylindrical special barricade robot with thick cushioning on the front. It looked like a large scroll stood up on one end and it was unrolling creating a cushioned wall that blocked the road.

Just when it finished, 2 or 3 Anti-Skill cars drove up on the other side of the

barricade and strengthened it.

Hanzou held his head in his hands.

“Trouble up ahead and behind!? Hey, Hamazura, what do we do!?”

“Well…”

Hamazura thought for a second.

“We break through.”

The station wagon roared with enormous speed toward the barricade as if the accelerator were pressed down as far as it would go and the Anti-Skill members waiting near the barricade hurriedly jumped out of the way. Just after an Anti-Skill woman jumped out of her car that was stopped on the road just in case, the station wagon broke through the barricade taking everything out.

Eighty percent of Academy City’s residents were students, so most of the crimes in the city were juvenile crimes. The barricade didn’t have the strength of a concrete block where hitting led to an instant death. Also, the station wagon had aimed for the very front of the cars parked lengthwise, so it opened a space between two of the cars and broke through the barricade spreading metal parts from bumpers everywhere.

The car pursuing the station wagon from behind frantically slammed on its brakes before it hit the remains of the barricade.

Before long, the station wagon took a sharp turn at an intersection and disappeared.

“Wow.”

The Anti-Skill woman who had landed on the asphalt after jumping from her car that had formed part of the barricade looked at the state of things and smiled in enjoyment.

“I think I’ve found an idiot who promises to be a lot of fun.”

Hanzou turned his head around looking at the scene disappearing behind them at high speed and whistled.

“Wow!! I can’t believe you broke through a barricade like that with force alone!”

“Well, you have to figure out what kind of wall it is. If it was the kind that will stop you even if it destroys the car or that purposefully lets you through and punctures your tires that method would’ve ended badly.”

With no expression on his face as usual, Komaba opened the car window and threw the GPS transmitter out.

“…Maybe we should get a different car…”

“We need to get farther away first. There’s no sign of pursuit, but it’s better to be su—”

Hamazura’s words were cut off midsentence.

A large specialized vehicle that looked like tanker truck had driven out of a side street. It looked like a tanker truck, but it was an extremely tough looking truck with a lot of, what looked like, angular armor on it.

“!?”

Before Hamazura could respond, the front of the truck hit the station wagon as if it had grazed the back corner. The station wagon kept its speed but was forcefully rotated about 60 degrees. The guardrail that should have been directly to the side now looked right in front of them. Hamazura didn’t even try to compensate by turning the steering wheel; he let the vehicle slide and managed to avoid ending up in a spin.

The tires screeched and black lines were rubbed into the road surface.

If he slammed on the brakes, he would actually lose control, so Hamazura stepped on the gas and stabilized the vehicle.

“What the fuck was that!?” Hamazura yelled turning to look behind him.

That was when his eyes turned to dots.

He saw a tiny red light on top of the large specialized truck.

“You idiot!! Don’t tell me you’re trying to pass that off as an Anti-Skill vehicle!!”

Just when Hamazura yelled that, the truck took a sharp turn as if it was swinging the tanker portion on the back straight towards the station wagon.

Hanzou’s expression changed.

“Oh, fuck!! They’re really trying to kill us!!”

A woman with large breasts was sitting in the truck’s driver’s seat as if she had shown her badge and forcibly borrowed the truck. She had a voice amplification device like a megaphone in one hand.

“U-umm. This is Yomikawa Aiho of Anti-Skill Branch 73. With charges of theft, property damage, attempted murder, and interference with a public servant’s duties, I’m taking you pieces of shits down to hell!”

“Tch!! Miss Tits there must have a grudge to put interference with a public servant’s duties at the list’s climax!!”

Just when Hanzou had yelled that and taken out a handgun, the truck approached with tremendous horse power as if it were responding.

Yomikawa Aiho operated the truck’s hula hoop-sized steering wheel and tried to overtake the station wagon. The boy with a bandana tried to lean out the window with his handgun, but Yomikawa turned the steering wheel swinging the back of the tanker portion of the truck and striking the side of the station wagon.

She heard an enjoyable crash.

The station wagon was pinned between the truck and the guardrail and forced to move forward, but the guardrail must not have been able to withstand the impact because the metal sheet tore off. The station wagon had lost all control and it

slammed into an uninhabited warehouse along with the truck.

After destroying the thick metal wall and scattering a mountain of cardboard boxes in the warehouse, the station wagon and the truck's trajectories separated. The station wagon headed further into the cardboard box mountain range and the truck struck the inner wall of the warehouse.

The airbag in the steering wheel activated and struck Yomikawa in the face.

"Uwpphh! …You damn kids. Now I'm going to chase you down to the ends of the earth!"

She decided to try backing out of the wall, so she moved the shift lever and stepped on the gas, but the truck wouldn't move back at all.

When she realized that either the frame was crushed or it was caught on something, she saw 2 or 3 boys with guns.

"Oh, crap," muttered Yomikawa.

She opened the driver side door and jumped out.

A second later, a number of bullets flew in from the passenger side.

(…Three-shot burst?)

Yomikawa frowned while hiding behind the tanker portion of the truck. Three-shot burst meant that three shots would automatically be fired every time the trigger was pulled. It did increase the firepower, but…

"Oww!? Hanzou, you idiot! Why did you make that huge magnum three-shot burst!? And you can't even change the mode!"

"Eh? But isn't it powerful and cool to fire a bunch of bullets at once?"

"…You even adjusted the length of the magazine for that?"

(Okay, they're all idiots, so I should be able to pull this off.)

At any rate, the boy was losing to the recoil of the three-shot burst modified handgun so he couldn't aim it properly. Yomikawa secretly believed she could

win this, but then she noticed the soccer ball-sized objects rolling from the truck and around her feet.

“Geh.”

This time, she ran at full speed.

The entire concept of Hanzou’s three-shot burst magnum was a testament to his idiocy, but it still had a reasonable amount of firepower. Hamazura felt that the truck the Anti-Skill woman was hiding behind was in the way, so he focused his fire on the fuel tank underneath driver’s seat.

Then he saw the woman running away.

She must have been worried that the fuel tank was going to explode.

“Okay, we drove her out. I almost want to capture that woman and her huge tits and show her what’s what.”

“…No sexual crimes…”

“I know, Komaba-san, I know. Anyway, the ATM. It’ll be a pain if she calls in backup and we’re surrounded. I wonder if the station wagon’ll still run.”

As Hamazura started to walk back towards the station wagon that had struck the mountain of cardboard boxes, something hit his toes.

When he looked down, he saw a soccer ball-sized sphere on the ground.

Hamazura’s face stiffened, Hanzou went pale, and Komaba remained as expressionless as ever.

“Hey, Hamazura. Is that…?”

“…Yeah…”

It was the large kind of firework normally only seen at a fireworks show.

Looking back at the large specialized truck, they saw the words “Fukuoka

Fireworks Manufacturing” on the side. And they saw similar ball-shaped silhouettes spread around the warehouse.

That was when they saw something flash.

It was some kind of electric cord that had been torn off near the fuel tank under the driver’s seat by the three-shot burst magnum. The bluish white light that was emitted headed for the gasoline that had spilled to the ground.

“!?”

“!?”

“!?”

The three idiots’ yells were drowned out by large flowers flying up into the winter sky.

In the end, Hamazura, Hanzou, and Komaba had been blown into the sky like in the explosive ending of a comical story and Yomikawa had come back to arrest them and throw them in jail. There were a few other ill-bred looking delinquent boys in the room, but they must have sensed something about the three who were covered in soot and beaten up, because none of them were looking those three in the eye.

Hamazura grabbed the bars of the cell with both hands and limply hung his head.

“…I agree that stealing an ATM isn’t a good thing to do, but isn’t the worst one that woman with the huge tits!? Because of her all of the cash in the ATM was burned up!!”

“…She makes it so things would be more peaceful if she just let the criminal go. …What a horrible Anti-Skill. You do see idiots like that in police dramas, I suppose… I really hate large breasts…”

“Ah, fuck!! Hey, Komaba-san, she doesn’t count as a fragile girl, right!? When I get outta here, I’m gonna show her what’s what! I’ll grab ‘em like this and stick it between ‘em!!”

Unusually, Komaba was complaining alongside Hamazura, but Hanzou hadn't said anything for a bit. Maybe the shock of having the fireworks blow up in his face had been too much for him, because he was sitting on the floor in a corner of the cell with his arms around his knees and not moving.

Finally he worked up his resolve and opened his heavy mouth.

"Sorry, Hamazura. And Leader Komaba, too. I'm really sorry."

"Huh? What's with you?"

The other two looked at him and Hanzou turned his face to the side as if he couldn't bear having them look directly at him.

Then he quickly spoke.

"…I think I'm in love."

"Ugheeh!?"

"Ugheeh!?"

Chapter 2: A Warrior and Dancer from Norse Mythology. The First Friday of February.

There was a certain small jeans shop in London.

“No. I have nothing to sell to you.”

“Wh-why not?” Kanzaki Kaori slammed both of her hands on the small counter. “I have the money right here! I brought enough money to pay your exorbitant price that ignores the market price for vintage jeans and enough for a tip, so why won’t you sell them to me!?”

“Because look at you!!”

The shop owner pointed towards Kanzaki’s thigh.

The jeans she was wearing had one leg cut off all the way up to the top of her thigh. This brought out an asymmetric beauty and just straight up sexiness, but…

“I’m not going to let you cut up the vintage jeans I travelled all over the world to get!! Here, I’ll explain it for you since you don’t seem to understand their value. These jeans are full of all sorts of creativity for the sake of the men who worked in the mines during the Gold Rush!!”

“I know that. And like I said, I’ll make sure to make a bag out of the pieces I cut off.”

“Mohhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

The shop owner tore at his head with both hands and yelled like an enraged bull.

“Anyway, I won’t sell anything to you and I won’t work with you either! If you don’t like it go crying to the god of jeans and premium items and apologize!!”

“…I see. And I haven’t even explained what the job entails yet… If you really won’t help me…that’s too bad…”

Kanzaki’s shoulders drooped.

“I suppose I’ll have to do something about the rumored Jeans Slasher myself.”

“Mention that kind of thing sooner.”

Kanzaki Kaori’s job was to defeat evil magicians.

It was the kind of vague occupation you would see in a picture book, but it was true. And because she belonged to an organization connected to the national church, it actually had the stable income of a government job. England’s heavy taxation went to things like this that the people didn’t even know about.

(Like in a picture book…?)

Kanzaki felt a bit of self-derision.

Her heart was actually shut tight due to certain circumstances. …Except that it was impossible for humans to keep just a single emotion in their hearts. Unless a person twisted his own fundamental personality beyond repair, natural decency and compassion would come out on his face.

“By the way, where is that bastard Stiyl.”

Stiyl was Kanzaki’s colleague.

“He’s pursuing that girl.”

“He’s still doing that?”

“…”

“Well, it isn’t my place to say anything about that. I’ll just be praying that some idiot gallantly comes running in to interfere.”

After saying that, the shop owner changed the subject.

“…Oh, Kanzaki. Aren’t you cold dressed like that in this February weather?”

The shop owner had his arms wrapped around himself and was shivering. In London, February was the season of snow. And that year all of Great Britain was wrapped in the kind of cold wave that would kill the little match girl. Small lakes were frozen solid enough to walk over.

And yet Kanzaki had one of her legs completely bare up all the way up the thigh.

“Not really.”

“Unbelievable…”

The shop owner had blue lips, visible exhalations, and was dressed as thickly as someone taking on Everest.

“So what’s this Jeans Slasher you mentioned?”

“It’s exactly what it sounds like. Some unknown person is cutting up the jeans of passersby in the street. So far, all the damage has been to their jeans and no one has been injured.”

“We’re going to kill this guy, right?”

“It’s too soon to decide that.”

“The Jeans Slasher, huh? I’m amazed you aren’t the prime suspect.”

“??? Why would I be a suspect?” Kanzaki asked with her head cocked to the side in puzzlement and her thigh exposed.

The shop owner sighed.

“So do you have an idea where the criminal is?”

“A little. This person’s actions have the smell of Norse mythology on them.”

“…Do you have any proof? Who investigated it?”

“Theodosia.”

“Her? Can we really rely on that? …Ah.”

An old bearded man collapsed to the floor in front of the shop owner and Kanzaki. Both legs and part of the crotch of his jeans had been completely cut off making them more like briefs than even cut jeans.

The shop owner instinctually covered his face with his hands.

“How horrid! This proud English gentleman has had all his pride taken from him so he doesn’t even have the willpower to fix his beard!!”

“Yes, if you’re going to cut them, it has to be done more elegantly.”

“I’m really not going to sell anything to you!”

Then Kanzaki heard what sounded like metal plates rubbing together.

It sounded just like a pair of scissors.

“!?”

Kanzaki immediately spun around and swung the scabbard of her long sword at about the same time as someone carrying a blade approached at high speed. The two figures crossed. A meaningless “dopah!” sound effect split the air, but Kanzaki’s jeans did not become denim briefs.

“Who are you!?” Kanzaki yelled while glaring at her opponent.

The identity of the attacker who must be the Jeans Slasher was a woman about Kanzaki’s age. She was a beautiful woman with hair that was more silver than it was gold. She was wearing a special breastplate made of an arrangement of various pieces of steel over a piece of cloth, similarly made waist armor, long gloves on both hands that reached her elbows and were decorated with a cow print for some reason, and long boots that reached her thighs and were decorated in the same way as the gloves.

Kanzaki Kaori’s eyes turned to dots.

The jeans shop owner was in complete shock. He spoke as his body shook.

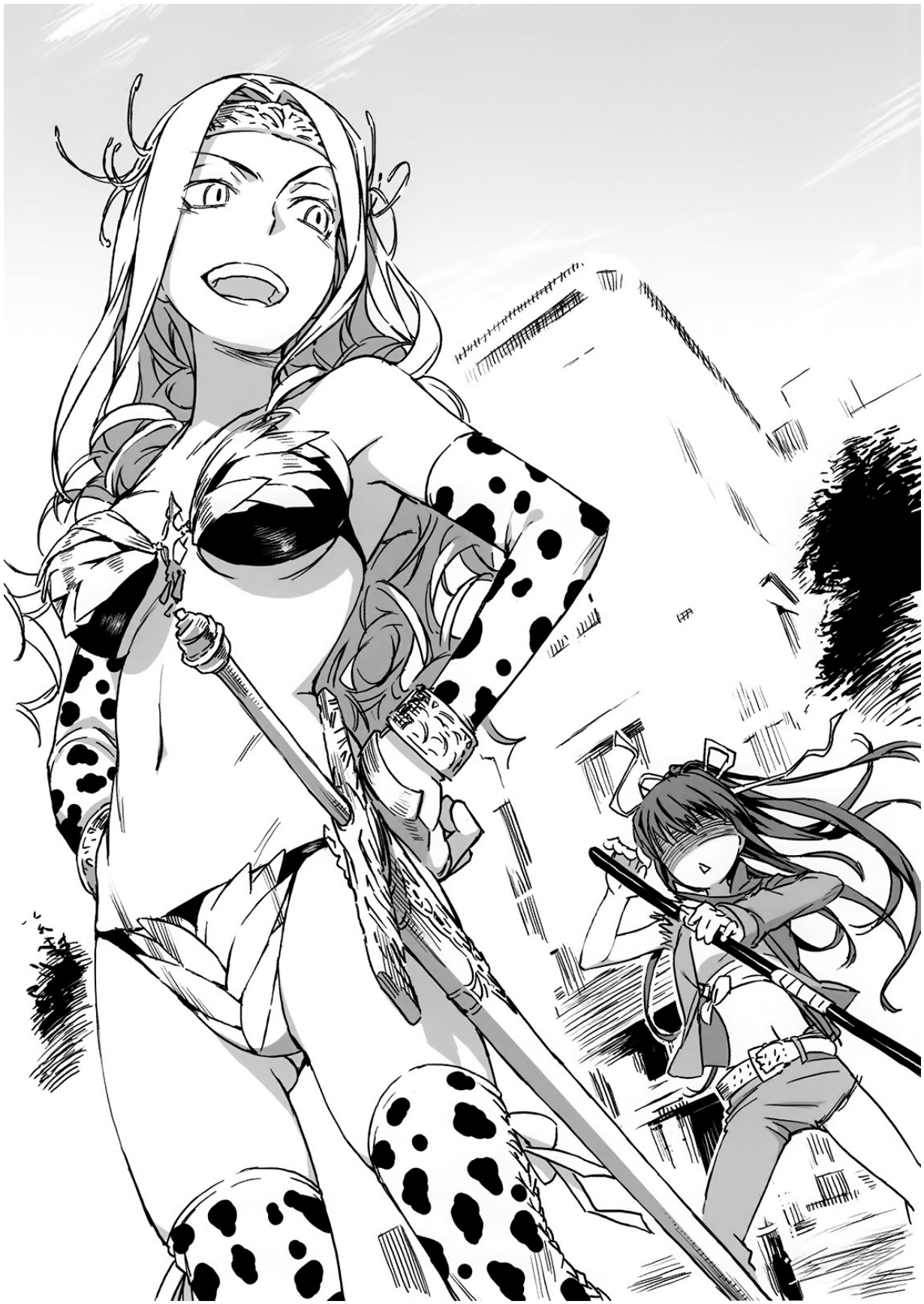
“That’s…the legendary bikini armor.”

Kanzaki Kaori was a bit flustered with that ridiculous outfit in front of her.

“Um, uh…where do I even start!? Well, I don’t think you’re wearing enough of a top, so do something about that!!”

The mysterious exhibitionist swelled up her ridiculously large chest and spoke.

“You’re not wearing enough of a top either. Even I’m impressed with that sexiness.”



“…!!”

“Wait, Kanzaki!! It’s too soon to draw your sword!! And let me say that objectively you’re dressed much too sexily as well!!”

“Wh-why are you holding me back and agreeing with her!? Did you forget that I have to fight that exhibitionist Jeans Slasher!?”

“No, we might still be able to settle this peacefully!! We have to bear with it for now!!”

“R-really!? To be honest, I’m about halfway to giving up!! Shouldn’t I hurry up and take out that pervert!?”

“Just bear with it a little longer!! Although, it’s true that as a clothing professional I can tell you that outfit is ridiculous. That cow print is meaningless! It’s just there to accentuate the idea of breasts!! And that’s caused my gaze to become fixed on them this whole time!!”

“That’s just because you like them!!”

The shop owner flew 5 meters through the air like in a Hong Kong movie after being hit by Kanzaki’s fist.

Seeing that, the bikini woman giggled. It was a quiet, charming laugh that was the complete opposite of her outfit.

“That man can’t be blamed for being aroused. After all, that’s the whole reason that I, a Valkyrie, exist.”

(A Valkyrie?)

In Norse mythology, a Valkyrie was a celestial maiden or a term for a human warrior girl. They were said to have the duty of sending the souls of warriors to Odin’s Valhalla in preparation for the coming final battle of Ragnarok, but there were sects that believed that they were not originally angels or spirits or anything else “not originally human”. Apparently, human girls could become Valkyries by wishing for the battle more than anything and being given power by Odin. Basically, courageous girls could become deified by heading down a

special path.

Humans could become Valkyries.

As such, it wasn't surprising for someone in the magical business to run across a sect that was trying to artificially do so. Magic was like an artificial diamond. It was purposefully causing the miraculous phenomena that occurred by accident. So it wasn't necessarily wrong to want to create an easy and simple recipe for becoming a Valkyrie.

"Why is a Valkyrie apprentice doing something like this? If you're looking for a macho soul, you aren't going to find one here."

"Tsk tsk tsk. Transporting the souls of warriors isn't the only duty a Valkyrie has. It's much more important that she serves the warriors in Valhalla drink and charm him with her dancing and have that soul train for the sake of Valhalla. My goal is to use my charm to increase my Einherjar and amass as much power as a magic cabal all on my own."

"In other words," said the warrior girl as she swelled up her chest even further, "this is my answer to what a Valkyrie should be!! Sometimes I fight, sometimes I dance, and I contain both courage and beauty!! I am the dancer in the sexy armooooooooorrrrrrr!!"

(…So she's not just idiotically dressed? She's an idiot, too?)

For an instant—just an instant—Kanzaki Kaori felt like completely giving up, but she shook her head and managed to pull herself together. Kanzaki's magic name was Salvare000. She couldn't give up here.

But she couldn't deny that she was distracted.

"Okay! I lost heart there for a second, so let's talk this over and fight!!"

"Hah hah!! We have both thrown away our humanity to wear these embarrassing outfits! A Valkyrie like me cannot be stopped by a magician like you!!"

"So you still have a sense of shame! Good, you can still be saved…!!"

Kanzaki was oddly overcome with emotion, but the sexy Valkyrie's attack was

relatively fast and strong for someone who was merely calling herself a Valkyrie. And as their blades clashed, the Valkyrie spoke.

“This is the true value of being a warrior girl. …This is Nine Support!!”

After she called out in a loud voice, the shadow at her feet suddenly split into nine parts. Kanzaki cautiously observed the mysterious shadow that became much like a magic circle.

“!?”

However, nothing really happened with the nine shadows, Valkyrie spun around in the center, and the shadows disappeared. Then Kanzaki heard something while sitting there confused.

“Muhooooooooohhhhhhhhh!?” came the sudden scream of the jeans shop owner.

“What? What? What happened?” Kanzaki said as she turned to look.

The shop owner who had been collapsed on the floor up until then was standing up in an odd angular way. No. Actually, 9 girls were grabbing his hands, his legs, his waist, and his neck forcing him to move.

“Hee hee hee. When magically calling in warriors, a Valkyrie can pull off 9 at once. My spell uses 9 girls to control a man as my pawn!!”

“And what about his will?”

“The spell is easier to use on someone who is thinking ‘What incomparable ultimate feminine beauty! You are simply too beautiful!! I want to just throw all other women out of my life and serve you!! In fact, your beauty is so great that things like god seem insignificant in comparison!’.”

Kanzaki Kaori interpreted that to mean that she wore that sexy bikini in order bring out sexual desire in men so she could control them. Kanzaki looked coldly at the shop owner.

He averted his gaze awkwardly and just said “sorry”.

Kanzaki simply nodded.

“I’ll chop off your head.”

“Wait! Wait, Kanzaki!! My sense of justice is in conflict inside my mind right now!! I’ll break free of this cowardly magic with love and courage, so just watch my manly way of living!!”

Valkyrie then bent over, put her palms on her lap and used her upper arms to squeeze together her breasts while she closed one eye in a wink.

“If you take her out, I’ll show you all sorts of things. Do you prefer to do things or to have things done to you?”

“…I’m sorry, Kanzaki. My heart just moved past the point of no return.”

“Okay, your head’s coming off.”

Despite what she said, a bit of kindness must have remained within Kanzaki, because she struck the jeans shop owner with the back of her sword and he flew through the London air.

Having taken care of the traitor, Kanzaki returned to the battle and asked about the core of the situation.

“By the way, why are you only slicing up gentlemen’s jeans?”

“Oh, my specialty for the warrior’s reception is humiliation play (S-side).”

Kanzaki’s desire to kick her ass for being a nuisance to others increased by 20%.

Chapter 3: A Father's Wish Creates a Point of Contact and an Interaction. The Fourth Friday of February.

It was the last dregs of February that came after Valentine's Day.

At least, that was the way a middle aged man named Kamijou Touya viewed it.

"I see. So they're having a carnival here in Europe."

The word carnival made Touya think of girls in Brazil wearing what looked like peacock feathers and shaking their hips back and forth at tremendous speed, but it seemed there weren't any peacock girls in Italy. Too bad. The men and women wearing masks made of glass that he did see were a very surreal sight. He felt that it was the kind of thing that would get the cops called on you if you wore it inside a department store.

As should be obvious from seeing this far inside his mind, Kamijou Touya was not part of a specific religion and he didn't distinguish between established world religions, new religions, and cults. As such, the stereotypical Japanese man tilted his head to the side quizzically wondering what kind of festival this carnival was.

He asked that very question to the girl working at a local souvenir shop in a tent spread out at the edge of the stone paving.

"Umm, well, y'see. A time of fasting called Lent is coming up. This is the festival where we stuff ourselves full of food before fasting, but a lot of other things have gotten mixed in. For example, the samba from Rio's carnival which was originally African religious music that then developed further in Brazil."

"That's a fairly sloppy explanation… So are those masks an official part of it?"

“Hmm… That’s just a custom from Venice that people thought was fun so they brought it here. There’s no tradition of glass masks here in Milan. Oh right, wanna buy a mask?”

The blonde-haired blue-eyed girl encouraged him to buy what wasn’t even a local souvenir with a smile on her face.

Touya was a little surprised.

“Ha ha. You don’t even know the fundamentals of business, do you?”

“Huh? Mister, you aren’t a traveler who came here because it was carnival time?”

“I may not look it, but I just completed some work. I just finished up some business negotiations.”

Touya was in charge of deals at a foreign investment company.

Explaining it that way may make him sound like a normal everyday salaryman, but the kind of business he worked with was rather special. Technically, he was part of the company’s “Securities Exchange Counter Measure Group”.

His duty was to do whatever he could to stop mergers or the trading of stocks that would be harmful to the company. In a world where anyone could use a computer to buy or sell stocks over the span of a few hours, his position was very important.

Generally, the securities exchange was freely allowed, but, when it involved crossing national borders, the legal regulations of certain countries could make it difficult. But that’s where he came in. Just eleven elites were assigned to the Securities Exchange Counter Measure Group and they would use economics, psychology, and any other techniques they had to do business in the “gray zone”.

(Well, simply put, you can’t say “stop buying this security”, but saying “you might lose a lot of money if you keep buying up this security” is considered okay.)

“Yeah, I don’t know anything about business. As you can see, this is just a part time job for me. I’m just stuck out on the roadside away from management like

the little match girl."

"Let's start with that. You need to have confidence in the products you're selling. It isn't because of the atmosphere of the festival that the yakisoba at an Ennichi festival looks so delicious. It's because the old man selling it thinks it's really delicious."

"What's an Ennichi festival?"

"It's the same reason the way the service staff at chain stores acts is standardized. If it's obvious whether the employees in a specific restaurant are confident in the product or not, that alone will change how the customers view it. That's why it's all standardized to show a uniform amount of confidence."

"So are you going to buy something or not? I don't care if you're just looking or killing time."

Touya sighed at her complete lack of motivation.

"I'm looking for an Italian souvenir. I want something that looks Italian at first glance and that no one would reject as a gift. Also, something that has the blessing of god would be a plus."

"Oh, oh, I see. You want a local good-luck charm. You Japanese people really do like your indirect descriptions, don't you?"

After responding, the shop girl started rummaging through the pile of goods.

"Here you go. It's a lucky one dollar bill. How does 100 euros sound?"

"Italy doesn't even use dollars."

"Here, I'll give you a receipt. They treat you like a tax evader if you don't give them out here."

"Hey, don't start bringing out a receipt when I haven't even bought it! Talk about high-pressure salesmanship."

"…Odd. I heard that Japanese people would buy anything if it was supposed to be lucky," muttered the shop girl, but then her face paled as if she had spotted

something.

She hurriedly gathered up all her goods, pulled on a string to fold up the tent, and had completed her escape preparations in only 15 seconds. Touya looked on in surprise and the shop girl spoke to him.

“Oh, crap. Something bad’s on its way! Sorry, mister! See you if we ever cross paths again!!”

“Ah…umm…what?”

“Someone who won’t let me sell souvenirs like this is headed this way and fast!! She’s especially strict about ripping off Japanese sightseers like this! Also, if I were to list off the three things I hate the most, they’d be parents, teachers, and missionaries!!”

While talking on and on, the shop girl picked up her pile of goods, put the folded up tent on top of her backpack like a mountain climber, and ran off.

(She doesn’t know what Ennichi is, but she knew the word “en”…?)[1]

Touya felt a bit thrown off after being left behind and he just stood there dumbfounded.

“…Mh. I was sure Balbina’s characteristic magic power was coming from here.”

Along with that suspicious-sounding muttering in Italian, a figure appeared.

It was a woman wearing an old worn-out white nun’s habit. She was somewhere between the latter half of her twenties and her thirties. Touya guessed that she must have once been beautiful, but she currently looked like the resident of a damaged piece of film that had faded.

She was squatting down with her palms on the ground where the girl’s shop had been set up moments before.

“Yes, it’s still warm. Which means she ran. By any chance did you see an unintelligent little lamb in the middle of her rebellious age?”

Touya was taken aback at being addressed so suddenly, but he soon responded.

“No. I only saw a charming young lady with freckles.”

“I have to take every point you have off for smiling while saying a line that sets my teeth on edge like that. But what are you doing here anyway?”

“I was looking at Italian souvenirs. Who are you by the way? Are you that girl’s guardian or teacher?”

Touya asked because of what the girl had said about the things she hated.

“No.”

However, it seemed this woman was neither of those things. That left one option.

“I am a missionary for the Roman Catholic Church. My name is Lidvia Lorenzetti. If you are interested in God or have an idea where Balbina who ducked out of the morning sermon in order to gather some money is, contact me.”

…Despite what she had told him, Kamijou Touya ended up running into Lidvia the missionary 5 more times that day.

“Why do I find you standing in all of the places Balbina is likely to go?”

“Because I’m looking for Italian souvenirs. She just happens to be at every place I go. By the way, why does she pack up her booth and run away whenever you show up?”

“? They sell souvenirs everywhere. Look, they’re selling Milan cookies and Milan manjuu over there. Just buy something and leave.”

“…Wait, they sell manjuu in Italy?”

“And you have a pasta dish called the Napolitan in Japan. There’s no need for you to buy the elaborate goods Balbina is selling.”

“Well, I have my reasons.”

Touya took a breath to help with his fatigue.

“Do you believe in misfortune?”

“?”

“I do. Because I’ve seen it. To be honest, my only son is a person surrounded by misfortune. He hasn’t done anything bad, and yet he always gets wrapped up in various kinds of trouble. It’s such a common occurrence that, even when he suffers through completely unreasonable experiences, those around him just point and laugh.”

Touya pointed toward a small doll at another booth.

“…It’s pathetic, isn’t it? I complain about it all the time and yet, in the end, I don’t do anything about it. I thought I could help even a little by buying up every kind of good-luck charm I could find, but that may have been nothing more than something to console myself. I may have just wanted to be able to say that I had tried to do something about it.”

Lidvia said nothing.

Touya could not remain silent even though he thought he was probably being a bother making her listen to his grumblings.

“The truth is, I want to rid him of the problems surrounding him with my own hands. I am his father after all. But what am I supposed to do about something invisible like misfortune? I truly am pathetic. I’m an idiot for clinging to this kind of thing.”

“…Heh…”

Touya suddenly realized Lidvia was staring down at the ground.

He tilted his head to the side in puzzlement.

“Heh heh. How lovely. It’s such a wonderful difficulty. It’s thrust before you and you feel like you can’t do anything about it no matter what. It’s all…It’s all just so…”

“U-umm…!?”

Touya gulped.

Lidvia was smiling. However, this was not the kind of smile that was meant to give relief to others. It was a smile for herself alone that looked like drool would come pouring out if she wasn't careful.

"Wonderful!! Such wonderful impossibility! Such wonderful irrationality!! The more difficult the difficulty, the more I want to solve it!! Heh heh heh. So you want to get rid of the misfortune surrounding your son? That speeds things up. Balbina! Magical Plant Master Balbinaaaaaaa!!"

As she yelled, Lidvia ran down a small alley at Mach speed and came back a few dozen seconds later dragging the shop girl by the nape of the neck. The shop girl, Balbina, was pouting as she was dragged.

"Ow ow owwwww!! C'mon! What's wrong with having a little part time job!?"

"This is no time for that! We have a situation here!!"

Lidvia explained the situation.

"Gehhh!! You idiot!! If you're trying to save someone, you need to say so sooner!!"

Touya couldn't keep up with the high intensity of the two Italians. Leaving the middle aged man behind, Lidvia and Balbina raised their voltage even further. Touya had no idea what was going on as Balbina pulled some strange dolls and dried plants from her bag. Then she started writing on one side of a small notebook.

"Well, I'll gather up all the ones that don't need a chant or a ceremony and have an effect just sitting there! If you make sure to follow the warnings on storing them I'm writing for you, it should all work out!!"

"It would be bad if he was caught by an anti-magician organization where he lives. Are you concealing them?"

"Don't worry! That's no problem!! They're all below the level of a spiritual item and none of them are only used for magical things, so they aren't enough to draw suspicion. They should be able to be passed off as odd souvenirs. They're a gray

so close to white that it would be hard for even professional magicians to tell the difference!!”

They pushed the items on Touya with their seal of approval and finally Lidvia practically forced a Bible into his pocket.

“If that just isn’t enough, go see a church in your area. We build them in order to protect the lambs who are suffering from meaningless tragedy!!”

“Ha ha ha. I suppose so,” Touya said while laughing a little. “To be honest, I wouldn’t say I believe in god, but, if people as kind as you believe in him, perhaps I could, too.”

In the same city, Oriana Thomson, the large-breasted female courier who often worked with Lidvia was using her seductive tongue to do battle with some gelato. Suddenly, Lidvia came running towards Oriana at tremendous speed and tackled her. “Orianaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!”

“Gbheah!?”

Oriana was fairly fit, but her body doubled over from the blow and the gelato was knocked to the ground. Completely unaware of the courier’s trembling, Lidvia put her hands to her cheeks and wiggled her hips back and forth quickly.

“T-today!! Today is such a wonderful day!! I may have been mistaken about the Japanese! I had thought they were the enemies of society for having something so uncivilized as Academy City, so I never would have thought there was a father there who cared so much for his child!! We may have to alter our plan for capturing Academy City to a gentler and more peaceful one!!”

“Wh…what has her…so worked up…?”

Oriana was having trouble breathing, but she managed to ask her question to Balbina who Lidvia had dragged along with her. After hearing Balbina’s explanation, Oriana spoke as if she was a bit worried.

“I-I see. But, well…sigh. Her annoying good mood is—”

“Okaaaaaaaayyyyyyyyyyy!!”

Before Oriana could finish, Lidvia suddenly yelled. Lidvia’s quickly wiggling hip hit Oriana and she was knocked to the side. There was a disconcerting cracking noise and Balbina’s face paled.

Lidvia ignored it and spoke.

“Let’s do it like this!! Difficulties are called difficulties because they aren’t easily solved! Let’s start solving it from one end for the sake of those who don’t know how fun it is!! First we need to prepare the spiritual item. It’s heavily affected by the arrangement of the stars, so we need to take measurements for the corresponding coordinates for the location!!”

Lidvia was excessively excited and Balbina ran off again. Oriana tried to run off too, but Lidvia captured the courier before she could.

Notes

1. ↑ She used the Japanese word "en" when she said "if we ever cross paths again".

Chapter 4: The True Strength of the Seventh of the Seven. *The Third Friday of March.*

March 15, 8:10 PM.

Not much had happened on White Day for Haratani Yabumi. It was the day after, and he was casually walking aimlessly around the shopping district when some ill-bred older Skill-Out boys grabbed him by the nape of his neck and dragged him into a dark, damp back alley—a very shounen manga-like bit of trouble. He was punched a few times, and then had his wallet and his cell phone, which doubled as a digital wallet, taken from him. If he didn't contact the service center soon, he would end up experiencing a disaster akin to having his credit card stolen.

"Okay. We don't want him getting his phone shut off, so how 'bout we tie him up to buy some time?"

"Huh? Really? But the city's birds are brutal. If some meat that can't resist falls in front of them, they'll end up pecking at it."

"Wallet phones sure are convenient. As long as you can get the number out of the guy, there's no credit limit."

Pyaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh!? Why did I get a new phone with functions I'll never use just because the lady at the service center recommended iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiitttttttttttttt!?

It used to be that muggers would only take his wallet, let him go, and that was that. The conveniences of civilization could be horrible sometimes. Just by possessing them, the user's crisis experienced a major evolution.

Haratani Yabumi, surrounded by five or six older boys, wondered how he was going to get out of this one.

But then a voice suddenly rang out.

“You lack guts, mister. You aren’t gonna satisfy anyone that way!!”

Looking at the entrance of the alley, Haratani saw a figure striking a pose.

The five or six boys turned towards the figure and remained silent for a second.

Bang!!

Before anyone knew who the figure was, one of the delinquents suddenly pulled out a handgun and fired it.

The mysterious figure collapsed to the ground. The delinquent clicked his tongue in disinterest. Haratani’s dissatisfaction with God leaked out from his heart.

What kind of ridiculous turn of events was that!?

“Frwaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh!!”

The mysterious figure stood right back up. The whole thing took only around three seconds. Unsurprisingly, the figure standing right back up like a self-righting doll messed up the delinquents' pace.

Despite having clearly taken a shot right to his heart, he had the tension of someone who had stayed up all night and approached with heavy steps.

“You truly lack guts if you’re willing to just shoot someone without warning. Or is it restraint? Is it restraint you lack? Well, overall I’d say you’re just a kid that throws a tantrum too easily!! Don’t you think it’s sad that it’s gotten so bad that you’re in a position where the media can just say whatever it wants about you!?”

The delinquent didn’t understand what was going on at all, so he decided to shoot again. He continued to pull the trigger, but the figure only shook a bit instead of falling to the ground.

Unsurprisingly, the boy was getting rather angry and he lowered his gaze to the gun in his hand once.

“Why won’t you die…?”

“Guts! It’s about guts!!”

“There has to be more to it than that!?”

“If you insist on me telling you, I’m also the seventh of the seven Academy City Level 5s known as #7 Sogiita Gunha, but that’s just an insignificant detail. The issue here is about the overflowing guts burning within me!!”

The mysterious guts guy naming himself Sogiita spread his arms wide, bent his back like a bow, and announced this to the heavens. Haratani didn’t know how it worked, but an explosion of colorful red, blue, and yellow smoke appeared behind him.

Haratani was completely dumbfounded.

The delinquents gathered together a bit and started whispering amongst themselves.

“If he’s the seventh of the seven, that means he’s the weakest of the Level 5s, right?”

“That sounds like something Level 0s like us could handle.”

The very #7 they were discussing could not remain silent.

“Non non!! I already told you! That whole Level 5 and #7 thing was all a boring digression!! What’s important here is guts!! It’s not too late! So just listen to m —Ow! Stop beating me with a bicycle chain lock and stabbing me with an ice pick! Ow ow ow ow! You all lack guts!!”

It looked like a comedic scene, but about ten episodes worth of material for two hour-long suspense dramas was present in the storm of violence.

And after it all, Sogiita Gunha simply wouldn’t die. His assailants began to find this odd, although their attacking hands did not slow in the slightest.

“Daaarashaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!”

Yelled the irritated #7, forming an explosion centered around him. The villains were thrown off of their feet along with a special effects-like 'BOOOM!!'.

“You’ve just been doing whatever you want this whole time!! I won’t allow it anymore! I will now show you what true guts are!!”

There was no real excuse for getting all worked up on his own like that, since his last attack had knocked the delinquents out cold. The fact that he threw in additional attacks made it a little unclear who the villain was. Haratani began calmly thinking that the delinquents were the ones that were going to have to show true guts to get out of this.

Then…

“Heh. I suppose that’s all that can be expected from small fries like them.”

A new presence appeared from the darkness. Haratani heard footsteps as an urban monster born from the darkness of Academy City approached. A huge muscular human weapon of a man made his appearance. He looked like the kind of person who had passed through three countries with a foreign mercenary group on his way there.

“I am Yokosuka the Organ Crusher. It seems you were showing some love for my boys.”

Lower middle class Haratani Yabumi thought that this man should be off plotting some master plan to overthrow the foundations of the world somewhere away from him instead of mugging people in back alleys, but the voice of Haratani’s heart did not reach that muscular final boss.

“However, you’ve stuck your nose where it doesn’t belong. There is no repentance here. Now that you have stood before an anti-esper battle expert like me, Yokosuka-sama the Organ Crusher, you—”

“Sorry, I farted!!”

“Wait, aggh! Stay quiet and listen to what people are saying!! So, um, fuck, where was I? Oh, right. Ahem. Now that you have stood before an anti-esper battle expert like me, Yokosuka-sama the Or—”

“Amazing Puuunch!”

“I said listen to what people—Bgrh!?”

Yokosuka-san the Organic Something-or-Other was trying to say something, but he suddenly rotated at high speed like a bamboo copter. There had been more than ten meters between #7 and Mr. Organic, but some kind of odd shockwave or psychokinesis had gotten a clean hit on him.

“Wait… cough… What… What was that…?”

“Hh hh hhhnnn. That was the true worth of Academy City’s #7. I create an unstable wall of psychokinesis in front of me and destroy it with a stimulus provided by my own fist. That causes it to send an explosive after-effect a long distance. It’s my special move, and I call it Attack Craaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaasssssssssshhhhhhhhhh!!”

He revealed this new fact with an explosion.

But Haratani spoke up calmly.

“No, that’s impossible.”

“?”

“I don’t think just applying a stimulus to a field of psychokinetic power would have that kind of reaction. My chosen field of study in the psychic power development curriculum is about that kind of thing, so I know a lot about it.”

“…”

“…”

The attacker and the attacked both held an awkward silence.

Sogiita Gunha lowered his gaze to his clenched fist briefly.

“Then what did I do and how did I do it?”

“Heeeeeeeeeeyyyyyyyyyy!! What the hell!? What kind of half-assed way is that to treat your special move!? Think about how the people who were taken out by it feel!!”

“Amazing Puuunch!”

“That’s exactly the same as the first ti—Brrhhfd!?”

Yokosuka-san the Organic Whatever flew into the air spinning around.

Haratani’s shoulders drooped. He had been saved, but he wasn’t happy about it at all.

It seemed Mr. Organic would rather die than lose to someone who would look more at home at a festival, but the physical damage he had taken was real. He tried to stand up, but his legs were shaking uncontrollably.

“Kh. I-I would expect no less of #7.”

Mr. Organic didn’t have the strength left to run away, much less fight.

He must have known how this was going to end, because he looked up at Sogiita’s face and spoke.

“…Just grant me one thing.” A genuine smile one wouldn’t expect to see on a villain appeared on his face. “At least finish this with some extraordinary attack —not something as boring-sounding as 'Amazing Punch'. Give me a genuine attack that almost sounds worth losing to.”

Hearing that, #7 quietly nodded.

He slowly clenched his fist, and…

“Amazing Puuunch!”

“I said not tha—Bibrchfsda!?”

Chapter 5: What is it That the World Lacks? The First Friday of April.

Brazil.

Following China and India, it was the next country expected to have considerable economic growth, but that blessing was not yet shining upon all of the country. Even in the large city of Rio de Janeiro, the boundary between the poor and the wealthy was evident. This made it seem like there was an invisible line dividing people's lives.

In that large Brazilian city, an Asian man was standing in an area that was dyed deeply in the color of shadows. He looked to be between his mid to late thirties, was of a reasonable height, and had a well-featured face. His appearance would have made him stand out in the country of his birth, but here he actually blended in.

However, he wasn't exactly the kind of person you would feel the urge to approach.

He looked like he had plenty of money, but looked nothing like a sightseer who didn't know what he was doing. He was the kind of good looking man who looked at home in the back alleys. No one knew what kind of trouble they would get caught up in if they approached him.

"Oh, miss. You've got something nice there," said the man addressing the darkness.

No response came. However, there was an unmoving presence in the darkness. The sun did not reach that area much, but a human silhouette could be seen. A girl with a Latin face and light brown skin was standing there.

The girl seemed fairly tense and she stared at the man.

“What do you want? Are you going to go so far as to steal a kid’s money?”

“You have a gun in that handbag, don’t you?”

The man pointed and the girl gave a start. It was less that she moved and more that she tensed up further. The man didn’t seem to mind and continued speaking almost as if he were humming.

“Oh, so not just a suicide. A double suicide. And the other person isn’t a family member or a lover. It’s someone you hate. Perhaps you’re planning on killing a debt collector to help out your family.”

“…How do you know that?”

“I have a very discerning eye.”

The man pointed towards his right eye with his index finger and a mischievous expression came across his face.

“Let’s talk. Unfortunately, now that I know what you’re planning to do, I will be guilty of accessory to murder if I don’t stop you. This conversation might end up being a good thing for you.”

“Who are you?”

“Nn…Misaka. Misaka Tabigake.”

Now that the Asian man had given Misaka as his name, it was the girl’s turn. She said her name was Ines. It may have been a fake name, but Misaka’s instinct told him that wasn’t likely. Simply put, Ines wasn’t in the state of mind to even think of giving a fake name.

“Are you Japanese? What’s your job? And do you have money?”

“My job is…Well, I guess you could say I’m a consultant. I have no money. My job is to create money, not to save it up in the bank. I do receive rewards, but I leave the financial management to my wife. I have so little money to actually use that I’m seriously considering putting an end to my drinking habit.”

“You’re useless.”

“Oh, so two little words and you’re done with me? It’s too soon to give up. Your conversation with me could give you a hint towards a way out of this situation you’re stuck in. I know quite a few people who have broken out of problems in their lives like that.”

“?”

“My job is to point out what the world lacks.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Simply put, I present possibilities for new businesses. If you manage to pull off the idea I present, you’ll be the president of a company and rolling in a bed of money.”

“Ridiculous,” interrupted Ines.

She looked around the area and pointed toward an area piled high with electronic waste.

“Trash is all there is here. There are plenty of things in Rio de Janeiro, but all we can touch is that. Understand? We can’t afford to pay trash collectors, so it all just piles up. Even if there was a chance right in front of us, we would only be able to look on in envy.[1]That’s the difference between the poor and the rich. The wealthy don’t want anything to change, so they even take away any chances we might have.”

“Ah, an excuse. Excuses feel good, don’t they? I’d almost say they are the best entertainment there is. So you’ve gone for one about circumstances created by the government or society, have you?”

“What do you know?” Ines could only become enraged. However, it was a silent rage. “I’m young and have no education. All I can do is clean car windows or something like that. How am I supposed to live off of small change like that? I can’t even pay off the interest from the debts with that. It would be gone once I tipped the men who came to collect the debt.”

“That isn’t what I mean,” Misaka readily replied to her expression of resignation. “There is a chance lying all around you. You just aren’t seeing it. … Oh, hey. Let me ask you one question. You don’t think I’m some saint

overflowing with a virtuous volunteer spirit, do you? I have my own objective here, so don’t worry. Think about it. I’m not just going to say some useless things to you and then be satisfied with just that. I make sure to look after the people I use.”

“An objective? You’re not saying I should make money by sleeping with you, are you?”

“That’s a lovely offer, but I couldn’t do that to my wife and at your age you remind me of my daughter.”

“Well, what else is there? What kind of chance could there be here? The area’s nothing but a bunch of illegally dumped oversized trash! Don’t fuck around with me!”

“That’s exactly it.”

“?”

“To be completely honest, I received a request from a certain person. I was asked to do something about all the illegally dumped trash in Brazil, so I have to do something even if it is a pain-in-the-ass job.”

“Ridiculous. There’s nothing you can do. Are you going to put up signs that say 'Don’t Litter'? No one’s going to obey them. The people dumping the trash aren’t doing it because they want to. They all know it isn’t right. The illegally dumped trash isn’t going anywhere. We don’t have the money to spare.”

“Is that really so?” Misaka smiled. “As I told you, my job is to point out what the world lacks. This small slum filled with illegally dumped electronic trash and poverty is a type of world. What is it that world lacks? Okay, Ines-kun, raise your hand if you know.”

“That’s obvious,” Ines immediately responded with a sigh. “It’s money.”

“Bingo!”

“…And that was when you met that Asian who called himself a consultant?”

“Yeah, I didn’t really believe him at first, but I decided I should bet on the possibility that he was right. At the very least, it seemed better than running towards a mafia-like debt collector while carrying a handgun.”

Ines was in the lounge of a high class hotel that was considered to be either the best or the second best in Rio de Janeiro. The writer with the recording equipment was dressed in a brand name suit, but Ines was dressed the same as ever. That said, no one was going to complain.

The writer spoke.

“So you decided to go into the business of collecting all of the rare metals inside the electronic trash?”

“Everyone knew that there were tiny amounts of gold inside the ICs and LSIs. It was only because of how much of a pain it is to collect it all that no one did it. I just didn’t have any other choice, so I did it. It’s not because I was especially determined or anything.”

At first, she hadn’t had any tools or a place to work. She had actually broken open the plastic of the ICs by hand and patiently gathered up the tiny fibers of pure gold. When she had gotten a pile the size of a bento box, she was finally able to exchange it for paper money. She used that to develop machine tools in order to more efficiently collect the rare metals. That let her gather even more gold. It hadn’t taken much time for this to continue until she had expanded enough for it to be called a business. It hadn’t even been a year since then.

“It was fairly difficult to prepare an arm machine that could accurately pry open the covers of integrated circuits of various different sizes, but, once I realized it could use ultrasonic waves to calculate the size, it was pretty simple.”

“Ultrasonic waves…?”

“Oh, you think that’s an idea a kid who never went to school couldn’t come up with? If you really want to learn, you can manage it somehow.”

The boundary between poor and rich in Rio de Janeiro was a difficult thing to cross, but that also meant that, once you had a foundation, you could expect to have stable growth. Ines had used that system well.

“It seems that illegal dumping of trash has gone down by about 70% not just here in Rio de Janeiro but all over Brazil. And I heard that the Minister of the Environment is going to be giving you a public commendation soon.”

“The people wouldn’t get paid if they didn’t throw the trash away. People who are driven into a corner aren’t going to listen to some moral speech about how people are fundamentally good. If you want to stop them, you have to tell them how they can make some money.”

“So you’ve changed the flow of the world by passing on the idea that trash can be made into money?”

“…”

Ines remained silent in response to that comment.

She realized that this was what the man calling himself Misaka had been talking about.

The world would change.

As long as the people who would change it stood up, it was sure to.

The important thing was to act.

It was his job to give people the power they needed to do so.

“Next, we’re going to use the funds we have to find a way to efficiently recycle plastic and metals like iron and copper. If we succeed in that, almost 100% of the electronic trash can be turned into usable resources.”

“Oh, I look forward to that. And I was just wanting to get on the topic of a bright future,” the writer said in an attempt to curry Ines’s favor.

Ines ignored her and suddenly recalled Misaka Tabigake’s words.

What is it that world lacks?

Most likely, he was battling the world even now.

He had said that was his job after all.

Notes

1. ↑ She uses the Japanese phrase "yubi wo kuwaeru ()" which is literally "to hold your finger in your mouth" but has the meaning of "to look on enviously while doing nothing".

Chapter 6: Getting to the Heart of the Discussion at the Beauty Salon. The Fourth Friday of April.

The chime linked to the automatic door sounded.

“Hm? Oh, a customer.”

“…Just put down that handheld game if you don’t want me to give you some trauma to associate with the term ‘customer service’,” said the young lady with two brown pigtails, Shirai Kuroko, as she stared at the hairdresser and shop owner who showed no sign of wanting customers in his shop. A few young male staff members immediately came from the back of the shop and started bowing in apology to Shirai.

She couldn’t believe that it was only the workers who had only been there 3 months that were worried about the store, but she had to admit that the owner was skilled. Shirai entered one of the spaces that was partitioned off by hanging sheets much like in a school infirmary and sat down in what looked like the chair in a dentist’s office.

The unmotivated shop owner circled behind Shirai and removed the ribbons from her hair with his fingers that were much smoother than one would expect for a man.

The owner, Sakashima Michibata, stroked at his goatee with one hand and spoke.

“I’ve gotten pretty hooked on using the irons lately and I want to try out the Ultra 14 Drill one, so how about it? Wanna try out a croissant? You can be pretty domineering, Shirai-chan, so I think high-class ringlet curls would look good on you.”

“My hair is naturally curly, so cut the crap and give me a straight perm in order

to get it under control."

"Umm…so an afro?"

"I said a straight perm!!" Shirai yelled eyes bulging when Sakashima started putting a hemispherical bowl-shaped device over her head.

"Fine, fine. You're no fun at all… Now then, to get your ends under control."

He pulled out a thin pair of scissors.

"You really must have it tough, Shirai-chan."

"With what?"

"At a prestigious psychic power development school like Tokiwadai, you have to get a teacher's permission for the shop you choose to get your hair cut at, right? Although, since the school chose me as a designated shop, I get a lot of easy money out of it. It must feel pretty constrained having all those rules."

"Well, complaining about it won't get you anywhere. You can get a basic genetic sample from hair and blood, and they don't want someone secretly collecting it and mapping someone's DNA."

"Hmm."

In his left hand, the owner held a number of different combs each with different sizes of gaps between the teeth. He looked up above his head at a large collection of cameras both large and small. The excessive number of cameras had been installed by Tokiwadai Middle School, not a security company.

Sakashima Michibata grabbed a tuft of Shirai's hair between his fingers.

"Come to think of it, I heard that there's a new subsidy for research on developing Teleportation powers. Apparently, dealing with 11th dimensional coordinates is hard enough that it's pretty unpopular even with the scientists."

"It isn't that. The 11th dimension mostly comes up in the quantum theories related to Schrödinger. The higher ups just feel like there's a crisis because there aren't very many Teleportation espers. People use the term 'psychic powers' to

refer to every kind of power, but there are some abilities that show up easily and some that don't."

"That's one of the mysteries, isn't it? I'm pretty sure that all 1st graders go through the same Curriculum with no elective classes and yet it ends up splitting into different powers where some can produce fire, some can produce wind, and on and on."

As he chatted, Sakashima cut off about 5 millimeters from the tips of Shirai's hair. The blade was set at the optimum angle so that it did not destroy the cells and left a clean cut.

"Of course, I also wonder why they're developing these powers."

"…Please don't deny Academy City the very root of its reason to exist."

"Oh, I understand that it's an attractive prospect, but it makes me think there's some influential person behind it all who's dreaming of eternal life or world domination or something." Michibata cracked his neck as he moved the scissors. "I wonder if the text books on psychic powers for students like you talk about the uproar over developing psychic powers back during the cold war. The Americans and the Soviets invested ridiculous amounts of money in it as part of their childish antagonism with each other and…well, it all ended in a failure."

"That was the Stargate Project, right?"

"Oh, so you know about it!" Sakashima responded in an idiotic voice and Shirai sighed.

"We learned about it in history class. They had no idea what they were doing and repeated their large-scale experiments again and again even though they didn't even know whether the readings they were getting qualified as a success or a failure. In the end, it was just a bunch of scientists fumbling around and wasting federal funding."

"Hmm. Officially, the project was developing psychic powers for military use, but I wonder if that was really true. I think there was a more personal motive full of selfish feelings behind it. You know, someone with an extremely cheap wish to be 'special' or 'chosen'."

Sakashima combed Shirai's hair and grabbed the next tuft of hair.

(It pains me to admit it, but that doesn't feel bad.)

"…But what was all that about?"

"What was what all about?"

"The psychic power development during the cold war. I mean, it was Japan's Academy City that finally succeeded in actually developing them, right? So where did the Americans and the Soviets get their 'esper samples'?"

"Well, they wouldn't get any funding if they had a 0% success rate, so maybe they were bluffing," responded Shirai.

"But even now you see this kind of thing on TV. You know, like with former elite investigators taking on unresolved cases. I somehow doubt they're all fakes. At the very least, I don't think anyone would wish to create something like an esper in the first place if no one had ever witnessed one."

"…Do you know about the alchemy fraud during the Middle Ages? The royalty and nobility all believed in alchemy because they thought they had witnessed it with their own eyes."

"Bah. Sorry, but I'm the kind of person that believes in alchemy, UFOs, or the New Jersey Devil."

"…"

Shirai's expression turned to one of shocked disbelief. It was the kind of expression she would have had if she had been told that a chain restaurant's hamburgers were made of earthworm meat.

"Then what are you saying? That some information on Academy City technology was leaked to the Americans and the Soviets during the cold war?"

"At the time, it would've been the Soviets. Ah, but that's impossible. The scientific technology inside and outside Academy City is off by 20 or 30 years. Even if all of the information got out, it wouldn't have helped them much because they wouldn't have had the technology to break the advanced

encryption. That would have been a difficult path to take.”

“An ‘outside’ super computer from back then wouldn’t have been powerful enough to run that handheld game I was playing.” Sakashima laughed. “They wouldn’t have been able to read anything off of an Academy City disk, much less crack the encryption.”

“Then what *are* you saying?”

“Oh, Shirai-chan, have you never heard of Gemstones?”

“…”

“Oh, dear. Have I upset you?”

“Well, yes. Day in and day out, my power is studied by having stimuli applied to my brain through electrodes, drugs, and even hypnotic suggestion, so I’d rather you didn’t bring that up.”

“I just see it as the difference between an artificial diamond and a natural one,” said Sakashima as he moved the scissors to her bangs. “If a certain phenomenon has been caused artificially, then, as long as the same circumstances as in the experiment are recreated in the natural world due to some factor or another, the same phenomenon will occur with no help from humans. If you don’t like the diamond example, how about a stun gun versus a bolt of lightning?”

“It’s just a hypothesis,” responded Shirai in a bored-sounding voice. “I’ve never seen anything like that, and, if it actually exists, the sample size would be extremely small. It would be regarded as an error in the data and wouldn’t even show up in the total results.”

“Hmm.”

Sakashima narrowed his eyes in a pleasant smile.

He suddenly stopped moving the scissors and spoke to Shirai as if he was challenging her.

“Do you think that lightning strikes rather frequently?”

“Yes, although it is extremely rare for it to strike a specific person.”

Chapter 7: Someone Behind the Scenes is Unprepared and has to Clean Up. The Second Friday of May.

He had dropped in for a visit at the city of Milan and utterly destroyed a human trafficking organization.

“Yes, yes, I get that much.”

The tall woman standing in the open front door, Silvia, stared at the man, Ollerus, with suspicious eyes.

Or more accurately, she was staring at the area behind him.

“What is that behind you?”

“O-oh, well, you know. I was intending to go destroy their headquarters and then call it a day, but these kids just kept coming out. If I just left them, it was possible they could get captured by someone else, so what else are you saying I should have done?”

“So you brought them with you?”

“Uuh…”

“So you brought back almost a hundred kids like you’re the Pied Piper of Hamelin?”

Ollerus had no answer to Silvia’s question and remained silent for a bit.

Silvia sighed and closed the front door.

“No!! Wait, wait!! I have the best possible answer for you!! I’m not saying we have to turn our apartment into a boarding school!! It just has to be until they can find foster parents!!”

“Throw them out.”

“That’s too cruel!! There’s no way I can do that, you heartless woman!! Are you someone’s animal-hating mother!? Reaching out a hand when someone is in need is the basic law of the world!!”

“You damn dust-covered ruined noble…If that was really how the world worked, things wouldn’t be so haaaaaaaaaaarrrrrrrrdddddd!!”

Silvia quickly swung the door open again hitting Ollerus who flew through the air like in a Hong Kong movie.

Silvia stood angrily in the doorway with her hands on her hips.

“You can say all the self-important things you want, but how do you think we’re going to feed all of them, hmm!? You’re always making these promises you can’t keep! Come here a second!! I think I’ll tie you up with rope and make you straddle the dog house!! Since you don’t seem to know what it means to anger Bonne Dame Silvia, I need to carve it into your body!!”

“Higyaaaaaaahhhhhh!? Is this a wooden horse that can easily be made in the house!?”

And like that, Ollerus was being split down the groin in the yard in front of the apartment. Silvia didn’t seem to be able to just leave the almost 100 children out there, so she invited them inside the apartment building.

Once Silvia and the large group of children had disappeared into the building, one small child approached Ollerus who was still on top of the dog house near the entrance.

“I want to repay you for what you did for me,” said the little girl.

“Heh…heh heh heh. I didn’t save all of you because I wanted anything in return.”

The girl stared at Ollerus as he straddled the dog house.

“…Is everything fine now?”

“No, it isn’t,” responded Ollerus plainly. “In the end, it was all meaningless.”

“?”

“I am glad you adore me, but I didn’t really do anything. Chaining those human traffickers up and making them do manual labor is no different than what they did. That isn’t what I want.”

“But I still want to repay you.”

“If you truly think that, then bring yourself happiness with your own power.”

The dog house dug into Ollerus’s crotch, but his expression was a very serious one.

“I saved you even though it meant I had to face Silvia’s wrath, so of course I want you to be happy. In fact, it doesn’t make sense for me to wish for anything else.”

Even so, she wanted to repay him for his kindness.

She just didn’t feel right being in someone’s debt like that.

In order to find out what she could do to make Ollerus happy, she first needed to know more about him.

The girl next went to Silvia. Silvia was bowing in apology to the apartment’s landlord and wondering how she was going to cook enough food for 100 people and whether there were enough blankets and space for them to sleep in. She responded to the girl’s question.

“He is the man who should have been a majin.”

“?”

“I’m not talking about the god of the demon world[1]; I’m talking about the person who completely masters magic and steps foot into the domain of God. That’s what I mean by a Magic God.”

Silvia spoke slowly.

“A normal human is likely to die from reading a great number of grimoire originals, but the power he would have wielded as a Magic God is so special it would have been an even greater problem. Even if you have the needed knowledge, it’s meaningless if you don’t have the energy needed to implement it. In the end, he uses the theory of Hliðskjálf to purify life force so that it transforms into a special magical power. This just barely allows him to survive the process.”

“If there were someone who used the power of a Magic God with only normal magical power, they would be a genuine monster,” added Silvia. The girl got the impression that she had been given a simplified explanation, but she still didn’t understand what any of it had meant. Silvia looked at the girl’s face and sighed.

“Basically, it’s like the kind of job that everyone dreams of having. Think of it as being a major leaguer or a player in the World Cup.”

“…You said he *should have* been one.”

“Yes, just listen to what that dumbass did.” Silvia spat the words out like they disgusted her. “It was the kind of chance that only comes once in 10,000 years. If he let it go, no one knew when it would come again. And guess what he did. No, he wasn’t even saving someone. He let that chance slip through his fingers while he ran around town looking for an animal hospital for an injured kitten.”

“…”

“He should have just become a Magic God, but he half-assed it and failed and now he keeps getting wrapped up in all sorts of problems. …Not to mention that he’s an idiot. Although I suppose some people would call it being sentimental. He isn’t perfect. Even now, he sometimes remembers that time and cries late into the night.”

Silvia sighed yet again.

Then she continued speaking.

“But you know what he says about it?”

“What?”

“He says that he’s always regretted it and if he was in the situation again, there’s no guarantee he would do the same thing again. However, he still says that he truly thought that was the best thing to do at the time.”

“…”

“Well, that’s just who he is. He’s an idiot to the core. And whenever I look at that idiot, I get the idiotic idea that I should protect him. Thanks to that, I haven’t gone back to England and just stay here.”

After managing to procure enough blankets for 100 people and getting the children wrapped up in them and asleep, the giant mass of exhaustion that was Silvia lay sprawled out on the table as if she had been crushed. She then uttered the magic words.

“…I’m going to give you a taste of the horror of lacquer after this.”

“Ee!? Having my crotch crushed by the wooden horse isn’t fun, but a hell of itching isn’t great either!”

“Well, you just have to bear with it until we can pass them on to a local church. …That’ll take a week tops, right? It’s going to be tough, but it’s a good chance to discipline your heart.”

“Wah!! You mean I have to keep it on the entire time!?”

“Anyway, I assume they were marked?”

“Yeah, they matched with the list. It was only a few of them, but that human trafficking organization seemed to have dealt with people that had certain idiosyncrasies.”

“…So it’s been verified?”

“Yes,” said Ollerus as he stretched. “It looks like I’m going to be busy again.”

The little girl had said she wanted to repay him.

But time wasn’t going to wait around so she could.

The man who should have become a Magic God left the city that very day and did not return.

Notes

1. ↑ The Japanese word "Majin" can either mean "Magic God" or "Demon God".

Chapter 8: A Kunoichi is Someone who Appears Unexpectedly. The Fourth Friday of May.

(Dammit, Komaba. Why get so fucking serious and say that I would replace him as the leader of Skill-Out if anything happened to him?)

Hamazura Shiage, an Academy City delinquent, was in the middle of his usual battle with the keyhole on a sports car's door using a number of wires.

"...Hamazura-shi."

Upon suddenly hearing a female voice, Hamazura stopped working and looked around. However, he saw no one in the area of the parking lot the sports car was parked in.

He decided he must have been hearing things and started moving the wires again.

"…Hamazura-shi."

(What!? Is there some strange fountain spirit here or something!? Is water going to come pouring out of a nearby manhole and I'll be asked whether it was a gold sports car or a silver sports car that I dropped in the fountain?)

"Hamazura-shi!!"

Suddenly, a mysterious figure popped out from beneath the sports car like a mechanic.

"F-fwa!? I dropped a normal sports car!! Ah, wait!! I didn't drop anything at all, so that isn't being honest either!!"

"?"

The mysterious figure slid out from under the car with its head tilted to the side in puzzlement.

It was a girl.

She may have been wearing a yukata, but she was not a Yamato Nadeshiko at all. While her hair was black, there was some brown in it around the bangs. She also had ornate hairpins of various colors with beads on them in her hair and glittering nail art on both hands. She had a lace glove on one arm. What she wore on her feet were more like a type of sandals than geta and thin straps stretched up to around her knees. For some reason, she had what looked like a metal shackle around one ankle.

The bright yellow mini-yukata she was wearing would make an old strictly-traditional artisan do a spit-take. Her dazzling thighs were completely bared and the left arm was sleeveless up to the shoulder for some reason. The wide obi was made of a transparent material and the yukata itself bared her midriff to match. She had two thin leather belts wrapped around over the obi and, on top of all that, she used a long chain as a decoration.

To a delinquent that had no choice but to wear a collection of cheap clothes like Hamazura Shiage, it seemed a waste that such high quality materials had been used for that yukata.

(…Wow, I'm surprised I have enough of a Japanese heart left for this to piss me off.)

Hamazura was surprised that his Japanese heart would appear in a negative way like that, as it usually only showed up during the Olympics or the World Cup.

However, this was hardly the time for love of his country to awaken within him.

"You're Kuruwa-chan, right? If you're looking for Hanzou, I haven't seen him either."

"Kh, so he has forestalled me. But if you do not know of Hanzou-sama's whereabouts, where is he…?"

"…"

Her manner of speech was as odd as her outfit.

(Well, she's got a nice rack and that's what matters.)

In actuality, Hamazura didn't know very much about the girl known as Kuruwa. Apparently, she used to be a friend of Hanzou's who he would rather not have had who hung around with him a lot. Hamazura's first time seeing her had been only a week before, when he and Hanzou were forcing open the door to a safe they had stolen and Kuruwa came by looking for Hanzou.

It seemed Hanzou was avoiding Kuruwa and she was coming to Hamazura and Komaba Ritoku now that she had lost his trail.

(Dammit, Hanzou. Why avoid someone with tits like that?)

Hamazura stared at the bulges pushing up on the front of the thin summer yukata and gave a slight groan. However, Kuruwa's excessively modified yukata looked more like a kunoichi's outfit than a type of kimono.

"Hm?"

That was when Hamazura had a thought.

A kunoichi.

A female ninja.

A ninja chasing after Hanzou.

Hanzou.

"Ah hah hah. Hattori Hanzou! Just kidding." Hamazura muttered without really thinking. "Ha ha, yeah right. Hattori Hanzou? Damn, I'm an idiot." He resumed working on unlocking the sports car.

"I-I-I-I-I-I must…I must eliminate Hamazura-shiiiiiii!?"

"Gwebh!? What kind of obvious foreshadowing is that? And that's a pretty stupid reaction for a ninja!! …W-wait, is that really true? Is Hanzou the surviving descendant of a near future-like Shinobi Soldier!?"

From Kuruwa’s flustered reaction, he seemed to be on the right track and an odd image came to his mind.

(The descendant of a ninja? Don’t tell me he uses mysterious ninja techniques or something…)

“Wait? But then why is he being pursued by a kunoichi?”

“Uuh!?”

“If Hanzou is from the Hattori family, then what group do you belong to, Kuruwa-chan?”

“Uuuhhh!?”

“The term Hattori Hanzou brings an ultra important person to mind, so is there some a conspiracy involving some ninja faction that’s going to plunge Hanzou into some kind of miracle battle!?”

Hamazura snapped his fingers while he imagined the crisis his friend could be in.

Sweat was dripping from all over Kuruwa’s body and her gaze shook.

“…If you know that much, I truly cannot let you return alive!!”

“You’ve gotta be kidding me!! The conspiracies in your world are pretty cheap!!”

Hamazura buried his head in his hands, but Kuruwa seemed to truly be at her wit’s end. Hamazura started wondering if he should give up on the sports car and run for it when Kuruwa pulled a black piece of metal from within the right sleeve that was so long only her fingertips stuck out of it.

The kunoichi girl spoke confidently.

“Tah-dah, it’s a handgun!! Prepare yourself, Hamazura-shiiiiiiiiiii!!”

“Ehh…?”

“Wh-what kind of unmotivated reaction was that!? This is serious!! C’mon,

don’t close the door to your heart! Come a little closer!!”

“But…is it really okay for a ninja to use a handgun?”

Hamazura was assaulted by an absurd sense of disappointment and the modern kunoichi girl must have felt some guilt because she started hurriedly explaining herself.

“A ninja is always armed with the latest equipment! So it’s fine!! The ninjas who fought from the Warring States period into the Edo period used arquebuses camouflaged as staffs and inro!! So it’s perfectly fiiiiine!!”

“That’s not what I meant. I don’t care about what you know about how it worked historically. Just don’t destroy people’s dreams!! I want to see you split into multiple versions of yourself in a puff of smoke!! I give up! And yes, I know I’m the idiot for having weird misconceptions!! Just let me go over by the river and cry!!”

“W-wait! Please wait!! Ahh, don’t run away with such a sorrowful look in your eyes!!”

The atmosphere between Hamazura and Kuruwa was like that of a husband and wife hugging just before they got divorced.

(Tch. I thought I could get away like that.) was what Hamazura thought on the inside.

Kuruwa didn’t seem to have realized Hamazura’s ulterior motive and she had completely forgotten about searching for Hanzou.

“O-o-o-okay! I’ll show you! Onee-san is going to show you a ninja technique now!!”

“…Ehh? Quit making shit up.”

“I’m serious!! I’m going to show you a true ninja technique!! O-oh, you really are lucky, Hamazura-shi. A chance like this doesn’t come along often!!” Kuruwa’s expression was the half-smile and partially tear-filled eyes that were characteristic of someone driven into a corner. Hamazura was a little interested at the idea of seeing a real ninja technique and he entered a back alley when

Kuruwa invited him in with a waving hand.

“Oh, so I take it you can’t let your secret ninja technique be seen in public.”

“There’s that, but it’s also embarrassing.”

“Hah?”

He heard the sound of sliding cloth.

And before him, he saw…

“Eh? W-wait!? What the hell are you doing!?”

“But, Hamazura-shi, you said you wanted to see a kunoichi technique.”

“This isn’t what I said I wanted to see!! But, wait, you’ll show me? You idiot, you’re really going to show that to me!? Gwaah! Daddy isn’t going to let this go any further! Wait, why are you twisting your hips like that!?”

“Isn’t that obvious? I just move this part like this and then…”

“Fwaaaahh!? Ah! This…this is…!! What, at that angle!? I can see but I can’t see but I…geblch…fwaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

“Ah hah, an opening ☆!”

By the time Hamazura realized something was wrong, it was too late.

With the thick sound of an impact, Hamazura Shiage collapsed to the ground.

Chapter 9: The Relations of the Real World are Unneeded in the Electric World. The Second Friday of June.

(The Goalkeeper is there. That is why I am fighting here.)

Kuyama Kihan was a hacker.

He was the kind of hacker that didn't really care about the distinctions between hackers and crackers that fictional stories often brought up. Perhaps he could more simply be described as an internet criminal. Kuyama had first touched a computer in the lower grades of elementary school. He had randomly hit a few keys and accidently unlocked the password for the faculty. Ever since, he had held an interest in the holes in systems. He had looked into a lot of things and by the time he was in high school he had an odd kind of criminal record.

(Is it around here?)

Kuyama was sitting in a normal open café with a wireless LAN spot. He didn't intend on making any errors that would let him be tracked by his "opponent" and, even if he did, he could fake the origin of the signal, so it likely wouldn't be a problem, but he still preferred not to "fight" from home.

He gave an arbitrary order to the smiling waitress who approached him and pulled out his notebook computer. This was Kuyama's "weapon". On the outside it looked like a cheap name-brand machine, but everything inside had been switched out from the ground up. This was because Academy City computers had terminal-use security ranks from D to S and a manufacturer number carved into them and, even if the origin of the signal was faked, there was a danger of being found if nothing was done about that number directly embedded in the LSIs.

(I don't usually get this nervous.)

Kuyama stuck a communications card different than the one built into the machine in a slot.

(I guess it isn't that surprising. I'm about to break into the Goalkeeper's system.)

The Goalkeeper was more of an urban legend than a real piece of information.

There was a skilled hacker among Academy City's keepers of the peace. The security of the system he (or she) had created with the full use of his knowledge and excellent skills was in the top 10 strongest systems in Academy City. However, the board of directors did not believe in this person's ability and he wasn't put in charge of a public system. This had created an odd situation where the small office that hacker was a part of had stronger defenses than the databanks that held all of Academy City's data.

It sounded like some kind of joke.

The world of hackers was made up of people that no one knew the identities or faces of. It wasn't unusual for someone to spread unfounded rumors to cause trouble or to make themselves look more important.

However, vague rumors held definite information.

Over the past week, several other hackers he knew had been arrested. Every single one of them had attempted to hack into a certain system.

He had never actually met any of them, but he knew how skillful they were. They had chatted via an illegal modification of the status of an online game. He didn't think someone of their skills would screw up while hacking into a normal Anti-Skill or Judgment office.

There was something there.

Most likely, that "something" was the Goalkeeper.

(There isn't really any data there I want to steal and I don't really have anything against this Goalkeeper.)

Under Academy City's laws, illegal actions related to electronic information were punished with jail time up to 20 years or a fine of up to 50 million yen.

Breaking in for no reason was no small risk.

(But my master key has to be perfect. If there's even one door it can't open, a master key is nothing but trash.)

It wasn't that he hated losing; he was trying to rip off the label that had been unreasonably stuck on him.

He wanted freedom and he wouldn't allow even the slightest hindrance to that end.

That was why Kuyama Kihan, a hacker who did not seek profit, acted.

The first thing Kuyama did wasn't to fake his ID in some mysterious way or to unlock a password by typing on the keyboard at blinding speed.

He assigned shortcut keys.

(I think I'll go with Condition 3 for today. Actually, maybe either 4 or 1 would be better.)

He browsed through a list of the hacking programs he had and chose the programs he would use. Then he arranged the many keys on the keyboard to set up his programs of choice so that he could run them with single keystrokes.

What Kuyama was doing was the same as prerecording common phrases for an online game such as "heal me" and "let's retreat" so that a conversation could be made with only a few keystrokes. Patiently typing every little thing out by hand was a waste of effort and, most importantly, it prevented him from responding quickly.

The only real flaw was that he had to switch into manual mode when he came across something that his preset commands didn't cover. He didn't want to have to do that very much. As such, he had to take the level of his opponent and what he had to do into account and come up with the most effective arrangement of keys.

(The worst part is that I don't know what kind of skills the Goalkeeper has. That means it'll be safer to create a kind of smokescreen. Being too careful makes it look like I'm afraid, but I need to assume this is an enemy that deserves my

respect.)

Kuyama loved this moment where he thought of his enemy and put together his limited hand. He loved it even more than the moment after he penetrated the system. It made him feel like he was connected across the internet with someone he couldn't see.

As he felt this special kind of joy, he heard a clunk from a nearby table. Kuyama looked over and saw a large-breasted woman wearing a green jersey sitting down at the table.

"Hoo. Writing reports is such a pain. Hey, waitress. Does this place have a wireless LAN? I don't want to go all the way back to the school to submit this."

(…What the hell?)

It said on the café's door whether it had a wireless LAN or not. In fact, a hacker like Kuyama couldn't believe that someone would submit an official report over an unknown wireless LAN that using a signal that could be picked up by anyone. She certainly didn't look like she was using any of the measures to prevent one's signal from being picked up that Kuyama was using.

(Fucking amateur.)

After silently expressing his contempt for all the casual users who loved computers but didn't know anything about them, Kuyama immersed himself in his work.

After assigning almost all of the shortcut keys, he finally started his illegal activities.

However, a hacker wasn't superhuman. He was using a specialized program for developers. He used a normal search engine to find a certain website.

In the center of his notebook's monitor was a normal browser screen and around that was a complicated window full of scrolling numbers and symbols. Basically, he had only brought the usually unseen information up to the surface. This was nothing that a computer didn't normally deal with.

Kuyama felt that the only difference between a hacker and anyone else was a

gap in knowledge.

It was about how much hidden information someone was aware of. A hacker was like someone who was good at goldfish scooping. They just knew the trick to it.

To repeat: a hacker wasn’t superhuman.

He was only bringing the processes that were usually dealt with in the background up to the surface.

(Now then, let’s get started.)

He had found the system that the Goalkeeper managed.

Of course, it wasn’t made so that normal people could access it, but a point of contact was prepared for exchange of Anti-Skill and Judgment information. Kuyama used that to slip into the system.

As soon as he accessed it, a change occurred in the window full of scrolling numbers and symbols. A few strings of characters were colored red and a number of warning symbols were displayed.

(Oh, link forwarding!!)

That was a system that made everyone who accessed a website move to a different website. Most of the time, the site linked to would infect everyone who accessed it with a virus.

Most likely, this was linking him to a site that would access his personal information. Anti-Skill and Judgment didn’t allow systems that accessed one’s personal information, so it was necessary to send an intruder outside of the organization’s system before dealing with them.

This time, the intruder had noticed it before he was trapped.

As he circumvented the Goalkeeper’s landmine, Kuyama smiled.

This wasn’t done in an attempt to guard something. A “weapon” like link forwarding was clearly only something used to attack hackers.

You could read someone’s personality from their system.

Kuyama Kihan was in high spirits as if he were enjoying a piece of art.

That was when something snapped him out of it again.

“I found it, I found it! Here it is!!”

It was a girl’s voice that felt like it was splitting his ears. He looked over in annoyance and saw a middle school-aged girl sitting at the table across from the woman in the green jersey who was looking a little down as she wrote her report. He caught a glance of a large number of decorative flowers on her head. It seemed she was enjoying playing a handheld game against someone.

“Hahhh. I finally managed to stabilize the speed. …Oh, no! Now things are getting bad!!”

The girl was pressing the buttons so hard it looked like she was trying to crush them. Kuyama noted that one of his flaws was that he was a bit distractible while on the attack and then moved his focus back to his computer’s monitor.

He found several more traps after that.

One made it look like he had penetrated the system, one looped the same command endlessly, and one caused an error by forcing him to open a file in a format that was impossible to read. As Kuyama had previously determined they were all methods of attacking hackers and a many of them even astonished him because he had never thought of using something like that before.

However, nothing had caught him yet. Before each one hit, the dangerous strings of characters were marked in red and he worked his way around them heading deeper into the system.

But then, just when he thought he might have won, a small window suddenly appeared at the edge of the screen. It was a short message saying the connection had been severed. Kuyama was doubtful, but there was no problem with the signal from the wireless LAN. The Goalkeeper’s system must have lost power for some reason.

(Was I noticed!?)

Kuyama looked down at the open windows, but, fortunately, there was no sign that someone had gotten his information. Most likely, his opponent knew that someone had hacked in, but he didn't know specifically who it was. As such, he had determined that it was dangerous to let the intruder continue and thus cut the power.

Just to be careful, Kuyama had used a variety of "detours" so as to not leave behind any trace, so there was no sign of worry on his face.

(That was nice timing. I suppose I'll call this a tie.)

He had used only electronic methods from start to finish while the Goalkeeper had been forced to physically cut the power. In other words, he had won as far as hacking skills went. He had more or less proved the effectiveness of his master key.

However, that was when he noticed something.

It was about the simple message saying the connection had been severed that had appeared a moment ago. At the same time as it had appeared on his computer, it must have also been displayed on the Goalkeeper's system. When you cut the string linking a tin-can telephone, both sides lost the ability to hear.

That meant that the exact same thing had happened at both places during the same year, the same month, the same day, the same hour, the same minute, and the same second.

(Doesn't that mean that if the Goalkeeper checks the date and time that the message was left on the system, he'll be able to find me right away?)

"…!?"

A cold sweat covered Kuyama's face.

(N-no, I had my embedded program that faked the origin of the signal. He shouldn't be able to find me immedia—!!)

As he was thinking, he felt like the café's security cameras and the lenses of the

security robots rolling along the road were aiming at him like sniper rifles. Someone's hand grabbed his shoulder. He couldn't even turn around. The hand belonged to a member of Anti-Skill, the city's keepers of the peace.

"You are in violation of the regulation against unlawful operation of electronic information. And, as I'm sure you know, this isn't a voluntary questioning."

However, Kuyama wasn't listening to the deep voice.

It was hardly the time.

(Wait. It hasn't even been 3 minutes since the connection was cut off. Even if he had immediately been able to determine where the signal came from, Anti-Skill couldn't have gotten here this fast. Which means…)

His location had been discovered sooner than that.

But when? Where? How?

Kuyama heard a clattering noise and looked over to see the girl who had been playing on her handheld game system standing up. The girl with the decorative flowers in her hair spoke after heading towards the cash register with her bill.

"Yes, I'd like a receipt. Yes, make it to Uiharu Kazari of Judgment."

All she did was play a game and ask for a receipt and yet Kuyama's expression distorted to one of pain. This was because he had realized what was in her hand.

(It…couldn't be…)

Her handheld game system was made so it could use the wireless LAN. That meant programs could be operated over the internet using it.

But…

It was impossible. No one could battle Kuyama's hacking system using something like that.

(Come to think of it, when she came here, she was saying something about having stabilized the speed and yelling that things were getting bad…)

“Hey…Hey, you!!”

Kuyama tried to approach the girl as she left, but the Anti-Skill member must have thought he was trying to escape, because he was thrown to the ground. Flattened on the ground, Kuyama still stared at the girl’s back. She did not turn around. Not even once.

He had no proof that that girl with the decorative flowers in her hair was the Goalkeeper.

For all he knew, the real Goalkeeper was sitting at the other end of the connection snickering. It was possible the Goalkeeper was the girl’s friend and was helping her out from the shadows.

But…

The real problem wasn’t the girl herself.

It was the Goalkeeper’s shadow that he had glimpsed right in front of him but been unable to grasp.

That back was a gray incredibly close to black and it was dancing in front of him keeping him from grasping its tail.

“That’s a hacker…”

As his hands were forced into handcuffs behind him, Kuyama Kihan mumbled what was more of a groan than words.

“That’s a true hacker.”

Chapter 10: Would You Accept or Decline an Invitation for the Night? The First Friday of July.

“I don’t know if it’s due to the Foehn phenomenon or El Niño or what, but nights in summertime London are just so damn hot and humid it feels like I’m gonna die.”

“…You need to watch how you speak, Tanaka-kun.”

“Yeah, but it’s still too fucking hot.”

Kamijou Touya listened wearily to the words of the new employee who looked like the only effort towards professionalism he took was to take out his piercings.

“You’re the one that said you wanted to go for a drink after we finished with our work.”

“Yeah, and we’ve been wandering from place to place cause you keep whining about every bar that has women in it, Kamijou-san.”

“…Have you thought at all about the fact that I’m married? Or are you trying to destroy my relationship, you damn bachelor.”

“Keh. How can you say that after you run into a school girl with wavy blonde hair walking around a corner and then lead a blind nun with ringlet curls by holding hands only to trip and dive straight into her tits? And what was with that girl yesterday? Even if it’s July, that wasn’t very much clothing.”

“Well, that girl was wandering around near the train station, so I called out to her thinking she might be lost. I wonder what was with her.”

Tanaka wasn’t listening to what Touya was muttering. Basically, what he was

saying would only infuriate a bachelor. Tanaka couldn't believe that someone like Touya had such a young and beautiful wife.

"I need a drink because it's so fucking hot, but finding a bar is just making me even hotter."

"Fine, let's just go to the next place we find."

"Well, it at least has to be somewhere we can sit down."

The two set off with that vague objective, but the bar they ended up entering as if they were sleepwalking had a surprisingly delicious dark colored local beer. They chugged down the beer with some fried fish and, before they knew it, some drunk was talking to them.

"Yeah and they were saying not to cut down the trees because it was bad for the earth. But those people won't get paid and can't support their families if they don't cut 'em down. Like hell those people are gonna listen to some ecological moral speech. People do things because of greed! It's greed! So to protect the environment, you have to make a way that those people can support their families without cutting down the trees! Those dumbasses just don't understand!!"

"…Um, who are you?"

"Hm?? Misaka. Misaka Tabigake. Ah, fried foods are all about the flavor. Yeah, it's more of a kid's kinda flavor, but damn it's good!"

Misaka-san introduced himself and then stuck his fork in someone else's fried fish. He looked like the kind of dandy gentleman who would normally be in a high-class black-colored car, but apparently the alcohol in the local beer had done quite a number on him.

“And I’m Japanese! We’re the people who are always yelling to cut down the trees so we can build the wooden houses we love so much! How the hell am I supposed to go up to the workers in the Amazon and tell them they’re wrong!? Quit yelling at me about global warming! Don’t act like you’re better ‘an me when you don’t even change the setting of your air conditioner, much less turn it off altogether! If you don’t like it, find a way to protect everyone while raising your precious trees!!”

“U-um, Kamijou-senpai? What’s with this drunk?”

“…By the way, what jobs do you two have?”

“Oh, we work in the counter measure group that prevents purchases for our company.”

“Ah, what? You’re the company president!? Hey, wait a second, I’m a person that points out what the world lacks. Anyway, the Amazon is a bit hot right now, so will you listen to me?”

Misaka-san kept going on like that and a sigh came from a table farther back. Touya looked back wondering if they were being too much of a disturbance. He saw a blonde-haired blue-eyed lady wearing a tight suit. He didn’t know if it was intentional, but the way she was drinking alone in the dim lighting and her weary expression made her seem to have a pink glow.

Suddenly, Tanaka turned his attention away from Misaka-san and his back straightened.

(Oh, no. I know what that reaction means.)

Tanaka spoke before Touya could do anything.

“I’m gonna talk to her! I’m totally gonna do it!!”

“Don’t. You’ll be shot down in 2 seconds.”

Touya started laughing, but then Misaka-san suddenly spoke up.

“No, he should be fine with her.”

“?”

Touya looked at Misaka-san’s face in wonder and Misaka-san responded with no interest on his face.

“After all, she looks like a whore.”

Touya and Tanaka simultaneously did a spit-take. Touya pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped the odd sweat that had suddenly appeared on his face.

“W-well, I suppose you could say he’d be fine, but that also makes it not fine at all. The law is pretty clear here!”

“But this isn’t Japan.”

Touya realized he was right.

That was when Tanaka put on a gentlemanly expression, filled his chest with determination, and stood up.

“I win.”

“You win what!?”

“Heh heh. Kamijou-san, as a married man, you can’t do anything here! But for a bachelor who doesn’t even have a girlfriend, it’s a different story!! I have the complete victory here!! Ha ha ha. Damn, this feels good! I’m gonna get back at you for showing off that young beautiful wife of yours!!”

After shouting that, the new employee dashed for the table in the back. The young beauty looked at the approaching Asian with suspicious eyes and he got right down to the topic at hand without so much as a greeting.

“How much!?” he said in English.

Immediately, the blonde-haired blue-eyed woman with a nice body formed a fist while still sitting in her chair and swung it directly forwards. With a thick noise, her fist sunk into Tanaka’s crotch. He doubled over on the ground. Touya and Misaka-san covered their faces and Tanaka crawled back to them because he

couldn’t get up and walk.

Tanaka then yelled at Misaka-san.

“Sh-she was just an OL, you drunk!!”

“Oh? Odd, I was sure she was a whore,” said Misaka-san carelessly and the young beauty glared at him. Apparently she understood Japanese.

For some reason, Touya started bowing down in apology. He felt a cold sweat coming on and drank another beer.

“Ordinary corporate warriors like us shouldn’t be having these kinds of adventures.”

“Is that so?” Tanaka responded.

“Talking to a prostitute in a rundown bar in a stylish city like London seems pretty dangerous to me. Not even the protagonist of a manga that’s always getting in trouble would do something as dangerous as this. It’s like stepping out on a suspension bridge when the ropes are about to snap.”

“Oh, that’s right. Do you guys know about Gemstones? It’s a different system from Academy City.”

Touya continued speaking instead of paying any heed to the drunk.

“We shouldn’t be sticking our heads in places that could end up being a lot of trouble. Doing things we aren’t used to is just asking for something to go wrong. You don’t want to get wrapped up in all sorts of trouble, do you? Just look at my son. That’s no laughing matter. It’s quite scary really.”

“But I want to meet someone and that isn’t going to happen if I don’t have a bit of an adventure.”

“You don’t need to make a gamble. You’re young, so you can wait to meet someone in an ordinary way.”

“But meeting a beauty is out of the ordinary in itself. I’m betting you did something to get where you are! It makes me want to punch you.”

Touya laughed and then felt a sudden tug on his sleeve. He looked over and saw a thinly-dressed girl in her late teens. She stared Touya in the eye without speaking.

“Who’s that?”

“Oh, it’s the lost girl that was wandering around the station the other day when you were gone. I called out…to her…and…”

Touya trailed off.

He wasn’t looking at the girl’s oddly sexy face or the feminine body lines that could clearly be seen through the thin material of her clothes. He was looking towards the mysterious girl’s right hand.

There was something shining around her thin wrist.

It was neither a watch nor a bracelet.

It was a pair of handcuffs.

The other end of the handcuffs was connected to the handle of a tough-looking attaché case she was holding in her other hand.

“Oh,” said Misaka-san who had been left alone and he pointed at her. “A Gemstone. You don’t see that every day.”

He uttered that mysterious word.

Touya had a bad feeling about what was to come and then the door to the bar was kicked in.

A mysterious group of men dressed in black entered.

However, those men were not the most dangerous ones.

With an amazing noise, the girl took out the entire group of men in one blow.

“Patrons of this bar that has become an area of danger,” calmly spoke the girl in her late teens without turning around. “I seem to have gotten you involved in a worrisome problem, but do not fear. I will ensure that you survive.”

Kamijou Touya didn’t stick around to listen to what she said.

He disappeared through the bar’s back door at Mach speed. This was one of his management strategies as a global corporate warrior who had visited areas of strife in South America. His survival instincts were nothing to laugh at. He was arguing with Tanaka-kun as they ran away together.

“See!? It’s exactly like I said! Ordinary corporate warriors like us shouldn’t try to go beyond our limits! I told you it was dangerous to go for things that are out of the ordinary!!”

“But, Kamijou-san, you were the one that ultimately brought in the trouble! This is why I thought being with you was dangerous! Your wife would cry if she knew about all the delicious trouble you get wrapped up in everywhere you go!!”

“Well, maybe none of this had to do with that girl and that OL you talked to was the daughter of that mysterious group’s boss!”

“If that were the case, it’s possible this could still play out as a lovely romantic comedy, but look! That girl came with us.”

“Damn! So she was definitely the cause!?”

Looking behind him, he saw the mysterious girl with handcuffs and attaché case.

Those corporate warriors continued to get wrapped up in more and more trouble and, in the end, they faked their deaths by blowing up an unmanned Cessna airplane as it flew through the air. However, they had something to say before the story moved that far along.

“Don’t worry!! If we work together, we’ll make it through somehow!!”

“No! There’s no real way we can win this!!”

“Ha ha ha. You’re not with your mommy anymore kid!!”

“No! How can you take this so lightly!?”

And like that the exciting London night wore on.

Chapter 11: Every Field has Exceptions. The Second Friday of July.

A girl was taking a nap in the cafeteria after the lunch break was over and everyone should have left.

“Hey. Hey you. You’re fairly conspicuous there.”

A male teacher who had happened by yelled at her, but the girl wearing a white short-sleeved sailor uniform did not respond. She had lined up 3 or 4 of the cafeteria chairs and was lying sprawled out on top of them.

Once she had confirmed that the teacher wasn’t going to just leave, the girl finally drowsily turned her gaze towards him.

“…The infirmary beds are the best, but you get kicked out of there right away.”

“You’re taking the life of a student lightly, aren’t you?”

“No, not at all. In fact, I love this life.”

“Yes, you probably are enjoying what you’re doing, but the life of a student isn’t one of pure enjoyment. What year are you and what class are you in? I’m going to go call your homeroom tea—”

The male teacher’s words were cut off by his phone ringing. He looked annoyed and hit the talk button, but his back straightened at the first word he heard.

“Yes, sir. Yes, sir. I will check on it immediately,” he said politely and then hung up.

The girl spoke in an uninterested fashion with her expression still one of drowsiness.

“It seems you have some urgent business.”

“Damn it. I’ll be calling in another teacher to deal with you. Someone’ll be here right away!”

The male teacher left the cafeteria sounding like he had lost but was unwilling to admit it. When the girl told him not to run in the hallway, she received a shout of anger in response.

(Looks like he was at his wit’s end.)

The girl checked that no one was in the cafeteria and then reached up to the handheld terminal on the table while still lying in the chairs.

The line was already connected.

The girl yawned slightly and spoke towards the terminal.

“Let’s get started, old man.”

“Get what started?”

“Our dangerous conversation.”

The girl’s name was Kumokawa Seria.

And the old man on the other end of the handheld terminal was Kaizumi Tsugutoshi.

“I hear things have been getting noisy ‘outside’ recently,” she said, getting down to business.

“As usual, it’s a complete mystery where you get your information from. …I assume you’re talking about the Gemstones?”

“You should be glad that your ‘brain’ is so excellent.”

“Yes, well you ruin it by digressing so much.” Kaizumi sighed in a manner that he would never show his secretaries or other subordinates and continued. “What are your thoughts?”

“We should leave it be. They can’t do anything.”

“…Do you really think there’s an idiot out there who would accept that kind of report?”

“Sigh. You’re quite the petit bourgeois, aren’t you?” Kumokawa tapped her temple with her fingers while still lying on the chairs. “What if one of the 12 members of the board of directors, one of the leaders of Academy City, was to write that report? If you just stared them down, you could suppress any complaints those around you would have.”

“Bureaucracy isn’t that easy.”

“As bureaucratic positions go, you have a pretty major one, you know.”

As Kumokawa spoke, she reached up to a convenience store bag sitting on the table. In it was a dessert-like sandwich with whipped cream and fruit in it.

“Fine, then. I’ll think about this seriously.”

“Don’t speak with food in your mouth.”

“About those Gemstones,” continued Kumokawa lying down with her mouth full of sandwich. “It’s true that the creation of the list is a little late. Because of this, America and Russia have gotten wind that Academy City is making it. Instead of cooperating, they have started making lists for themselves. At this rate, they might even get in the way of our work.”

“…If you knew that, how did you end up with ‘We should leave it be. They can’t do anything.’?”

“I’m not finished,” said Kumokawa bluntly. “Am I correct in assuming that our current issue is finding a way to efficiently ‘eliminate’ the problem presented by the Gemstones scattered around the world?”

“Yes.”

“And what you all are worried about is other organizations acquiring and analyzing these Gemstones and then creating their own psychic power development institutions?”

“Yes.”

“Then it isn’t a problem. Right now, American and Russia are the ones on the move. Heh heh. They failed during the cold war and they still haven’t given up that dream. However, they can’t complete the research. No matter how many samples they gather up, they don’t even have a way of knowing what the data means.”

“How can you be so sure?” a slightly puzzled Kaizumi asked.

“Let’s talk about Russia’s research. The ‘esper’ they claim to have created through a crystallization of all their greatest technology is someone who activates his special power by fervently praying to Mary. …Well, I’m not really trying to deny religion, but that kind of focus on the spirit will only get you so far. Do you understand what I’m trying to say? Why did they establish a ‘scientific’ research institution? They can’t distinguish between what is miraculous and what is not. They don’t even know what kind of miraculous thing they’re searching for. If they just treat everything miraculous as the same, they’ll never catch up to us.”

“…”

“Anyone can eventually catch up to a type of human skill, but someone that doesn’t even know what path to go down can’t do anything.”

Kumokawa Seria’s expression was one of boredom.

Her drowsiness was leaving bit by bit as if she was sipping on some unpleasant tea.

“Are you still not willing to accept it?”

“Of course not. You have no proof.”

“Then you just have to prepare the proof yourself.” Kumokawa’s words were as blunt as ever. “There have been any number of institutions claiming to be developing psychic powers, but Gemstones are actually quite rare. There are probably only 50 of them in the entire world. Unlike the strange scientists, you can’t find Gemstones just anywhere. Which group do you think would be easier to take care of: the irregulars who wouldn’t even fill 2 classrooms or the

eccentrics who are crawling around everywhere like bugs?”

“…So that’s your conclusion.”

“I don’t think it’s necessary, but, if you really won’t accept my view, it’s the only option. Just bear with the extra paperwork. That’s all I’m going to tell you as your brain.”

There was a short period of silence.

Finally, Kaizumi spoke.

“What exactly is a Gemstone?”

“That question is one only someone influenced by Academy City science would ask. You’ve always assumed that espers could only be created here.”

“No, I understand the theory behind it.”

It seemed Kaizumi was choosing his words carefully. However, the very fact that Kumokawa had picked up on that meant he had failed. Because he had employed the use of her as his brain, he didn’t need to act smart around her.

“I know that, if what Academy City creates are artificial diamonds, then Gemstones are natural diamonds created when the exact same circumstances are recreated in the natural world. Given that, what is a Gemstone?”

“…”

“We have a few here in Academy City. Deep Blood and Imagine Breaker for example. …But they just don’t seem like proper powers. It feels like those powers lie in a different direction than the easily displayed powers that create fire or electricity or something.”

“Heh. It seems idiots worry about idiotic things,” responded Kumokawa. “If we add in Academy City’s #7 that you wanted an explanation for, it seems that’s a special characteristic of theirs. It isn’t that they’re powerful; they’re just rare. But that alone gives them value to us.”

(But the obvious problem with espers that are useful because they’re rare is that

there aren’t very many of them,) Kumokawa added silently.

“There’s one more thing I should tell you as your brain.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s probably best if you don’t put Imagine Breaker in the category of Gemstones. I don’t know the details, but he’s probably something…much more interesting than we think.”

“…”

Kaizumi Tsugutoshi remained silent for a short bit.

His brain had said there was something she didn’t know. He thought about what that meant before speaking again.

“…You sound like you’re enjoying yourself.”

“Of course. Thinking is my job.”

Let us move the stage to after school. A boy with spiky black hair was walking with a large number of other students as they headed to their club activities or out to have some fun.

However, that boy had the misfortune of having the sprinkler malfunction in a way that caused it to spray him and him alone directly on the head. When the one-person shower came down on the boy’s head like a theater spotlight, he yelled out in surprise.

“Fbaahh!?”

That was when a girl in a white short-sleeved sailor uniform showed up.

She came over next to the boy with the wet spiky hair and just laughed at him without lending him a towel or a handkerchief or anything.

“The most meaningless things always happen to you, don’t they?”

“…Shut up. It’s just my usual misfortune.”

“I wonder how that misfortune works. If you looked into it, you might be able to find an interesting set of rules behind it.”

“You certainly seem to be enjoying yourself, senpai.”

“Oh, I am. It’s because of things like this that I love this life so much.”

She giggled and then continued speaking.

“This school is overflowing with exciting things.”

Chapter 12: A Debate Between a Sniper and a Bomber. The Fourth Friday of July.

This occurred three days prior.

“Sniping is so old fashioned,” came a voice to the front.

“…”

As a man who earned his living expenses by being hired as a sniper, Sunazara Chimitsu was at a loss for words. However, the woman in front of him continued speaking as he cleaned out the slight bit of soot that had gathered inside his gun.

“Actually, doesn’t sniping have a lot of pointless things in it? Whether it’s 5 mm or 7 mm, aiming for someone’s head or chest with such a small bullet is just pointless. Just a little bit of wind and the bullet’s trajectory is off, the target just has to sneeze and you’ve failed, and, if they’re wearing any bulletproof equipment, you might not kill them in one shot. That all just makes it pointless.”

“…”

She was a tall woman. She was even taller than Sunazara, who was solidly built himself. She was also thin. She might even have been thin enough to be said to have a model’s figure. She was a beautiful woman with a well-featured face, but she wasn’t fit for this job. She was so beautiful that it harmed her ability to hide herself.

There was more to hiding oneself than putting on camouflage and hiding in the jungle.

For example, when sniping in a large city, a sniper would mix in with the crowd, head for an elevated area, and then mix back in with the crowd to leave once the attack was complete. She wasn’t suited for that kind of job.

Her name was Stephanie Gorgeouspalace.

(She should really just get up on the stage rather than working as an assassin.)

“Hm? Sunazara-san, are you sulking?”

“…No, I am not,” responded Sunazara in a whisper. “But as a fellow assassin, I’ll ask you this: What other way to carry this out is there besides sniping?”

Sunazara assembled his gun that was now free of dirt and pointed with his chin towards the diagram spread out on the table. It was a diagram of the locations of a stereotypical villain and the guards surrounding him.

“These idiots are faking psychic powers and made an enemy of a group of overseas Chinese merchants. They’ve been gathering money by saying that they’ll develop psychic powers in a different way than Academy City if they get investments. How would you take them out?”

They weren’t people who you could take on by charging at them with a blade and they weren’t stupid enough to let someone rig their cars with bombs. Sunazara felt the most efficient way would be to put a bullet through the leader’s eyes in the few dozen seconds between leaving a building and entering his bulletproof car.

“Oh, you misunderstood me. I’m not saying every single kind of sniping is old fashioned. I’m just saying that using a sniper rifle like that is. I’m not denying the usefulness of every kind of sniping.”

“…”

“Now I know you’re sulking.”

“No, I am not,” responded Sunazara as he replaced the cover over the bare inner portions of the gun and reached over to the sight.

Stephanie looked at Sunazara and then continued speaking.

“There’s no rule that says that sniping has to be done with a bullet. We have all sorts of weapons these days and we should be finding new ways to do things with them.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“To be blunt, wouldn’t this be easier with a missile launcher?”

“…”

“Wha-!? Sunazara-san, don’t look at me like I’m a heretic!! Y’know, it really would be easier. When you’re sniping, missing a vital spot means you’ve failed, but a missile just has to hit somewhere nearby and the target will be killed in the blast, right!? And it’ll kill them even if they’re wearing bulletproof equipment, so it’s easier in every way!!”

“…Heh.”

“A scornful laugh!? With a rifle, you can shoot from at most 1000 meters away, but you can aim with a missile from 5 times that distance! It opens up whole new possibilities for missions, doesn’t it!?”

“Fine then. This is your job. You can carry it out with whatever supplies you want.”

“And that’s what I’ll do!!” Stephanie said proudly as she brought out a brand new-looking missile launcher that was supported over the shoulder. It seemed she had chosen a surface-to-air launcher instead of an anti-tank one for the sake of accuracy and distance. And yet she was attacking a target on the ground.

“…You really are a heretic.”

“So what!? I just have to kill the target!!”

And now for the continuation of that conversation from 3 days before.

Stephanie Gorgeouspalace was sobbing in front of Sunazara Chimitsu.

“…You failed.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“…They’re saying on the news that he miraculously survived.”

“But that isn’t true!!”

Stephanie jumped towards Sunazara to take the remote control from him.

“I blew him away with the missile launcher!! Him and his bodyguards all at once!! Even my withdrawal was perfect!! But they hid the body and the fact that he died and then reported that he survived!! That’s not fair! The client is breaking his promise by not paying me!”

“…This is why I told you not to use a missile.”

“No, you didn’t! You never said anything as kind as that!!”

While nimbly avoiding Stephanie’s attacks, Sunazara changed the channel. Every station was telling essentially the same story.

“Blowing all of them away makes it a catastrophe. If you efficiently ‘display’ the body, they can’t fool anyone.”

Sunazara sighed and then continued.

“To the client, it doesn’t matter if the target is truly alive or dead. Socially, the target is still alive. The ability to reliably kill the target in every meaning of the word is the quality looked for in an assassin.”

“…Uh huh.”

“That is why we go out of our way to hide within heavily guarded parades and put a bullet between the target’s eyes while everyone is watching. Not causing so much damage is better at preventing anyone from making excuses and a shot to the head is especially effective in that regard. Old fashioned methods are used in modern times because of how effective they are. Really, how stupid can you be?”

At that point, Sunazara threw the remote control to the side and pushed Stephanie away.

“What are you going to do now?”

“Eh? What do you mean?”

“…Now that you have failed so spectacularly leaving your target alive in a social sense, it becomes exceedingly hard to re-kill him. In a way, you have created a situation even more difficult to deal with than before. This is more than enough to make the client resent you.”

“Ugeh.”

“So you didn’t even think this through… Stupid isn’t a strong enough word to describe an idiot like you.”

Stephanie finally started to get flustered and panicky and Sunazara sighed. He grabbed the sniper rifle case lying on the table.

“Let’s go.”

“Ah. Are we making a run for it?”

“The client is with the overseas Chinese merchants, so crossing national borders wouldn’t help. If you want to survive, you’re going to have to re-kill the target.”

“?”

Stephanie tilted her head to the side in puzzlement and Sunazara pointed with his chin towards the TV screen.

“I thought some writer had created a script and it was all an act, but there’s too much of his characteristic persuasiveness there. …He must really be alive.”

“Eh? But…”

“Did you actually see the body? And even if you did, it could have been a body double. Either way, the target must be using this to let the residents of the underworld believe he is dead to prevent any further pursuit.”

“Um. Does that mean…I have a chance?”

“Yes, aren’t you glad? You’ve been given a chance to live on due to your complete lack of skill. An assassin that doesn’t even get proof that she has killed her target is more vulgar than a housewife wielding a heavy ashtray against her cheating husband. One thing I know is that I will never die in an explosion no

matter what.”

“Ohhh!! Sunazara-san, you’re being unusually bitter!”

(Of course I am,) Sunazara spat out in his heart.

After all, he was heading out to snipe someone for no pay because he had to clean up for some idiot that missed her target.

Chapter 13: The Accuracy of Their Collective Fortunes. The Fourth Friday of August.

Around 10 girls with the exact same face were hospitalized in a hospital in Academy City's seventh district. They were the military clones known as the Sisters created from the cells of a certain Level 5. Because their growth rates had been forcibly increased with drugs, their life-span had been decreased and a questionable-looking doctor was performing "adjustments" in order to fix that decreased life-span.

Their basic appearance was white skin, brown eyes, short brown hair, and the gray pleated skirt, white blouse, and beige summer sweater that made up the Tokiwadai Middle School summer uniform. There was no reason that they had to dress the same just because they were clones, but they still all matched. It may have been due to the effect of the brain wave network connecting their minds and it may have been due to all their personalities being set the same when they were created.

Currently, they were in a part of the hospital called the clinical research area. The area wasn't strictly off limits, but it was removed from the routes connecting to the wards and the main facility. This made it a mysterious place that not many people approached.

Misakas #10032, #10039, #13577, and #19090 were standing blankly in a small waiting room at one end of a hallway in the clinical research area. The waiting room had a commonplace sofa and table and a magazine rack full of magazines to kill time with. The four clone girls had taken one of those magazines out, opened it up to a certain page, and were staring very intently at it.

It was the fortune corner.

There was nothing genuinely occult written there; it was the kind of fortune corner that could be found in any magazine tucked away in a corner like sushi

ginger. The page was divided up into 12 sections and each zodiac sign had its luck, health, economic fortune, love, and other simple parameters listed. They also had their lucky colors and lucky items listed.

“If Misaka looks up her creation date in the 12 Greek signs…”

#10032, the girl that a certain spiky-haired boy called “Misaka Imouto”, looked down at the zodiac signs.

“This month is your chance for a change of occupation! Now is the time to say adios to that boss you’re indebted to but you don’t like too much!!”

“…”

A military clone like her didn’t even have an occupation. #10032 tilted her head to the side slightly.

The other Sisters felt the same way for the most part as they found the sign that matched their creation dates and read the column of text tracing it with their fingers.

“Will this uncertain information really benefit the Misakas? asks Misaka #10039.”

“How is this lucky item supposed to bring luck to Misaka? asks Misaka #13577 as she decides to look for a cat key chain.”

“M-Misaka simply cannot accept that her love fortune for this month is minus 5, says Misaka #19090 as she demands a redo.”

#19090 continued mumbling, but those girls were not the type to pay it any heed. That was when #10032 looked up as she realized something.

“…Actually, what time should the Misakas consider to be their birth? asks Misaka #10032 as she rechecks a basic definition.”

“?”

“The Misakas’ creation dates match the time they were taken from the culture equipment, but the Misakas were not taken from the container at exactly 0 years

of age. They were taken out after being aged to a physical age of 14 with drugs, says Misaka #10032 as she gives a lengthy supplementary explanation."

"So it is like the Misakas were growing in what for humans would be their mother's belly for 14 years before finally coming out, says Misaka #10039 as she joins in with the Misaka next to her."

"…No, it doesn't matter how long the Misakas grew. Isn't the time someone comes from their mother's belly a good enough definition for their birthday? says Misaka #13577 as she takes the opposing view."

"No, the Misakas were taken between various machines while growing. How does one classify it in that case? says Misaka #19090 as her head is filled with ?'s."

The Sisters continued to mumble and complain between themselves.

"Perhaps the date that should be commemorated as the Misakas' birth is the day the plan to create them from the DNA map was approved, says Misaka #10032 as she proposes a different idea."

"But that would be analogous to the day a human's mother and father had sex, says Misaka #10039 as she gives a rebuttal."

"Or maybe it's more like when the sperm was created inside the father's body before they have sex, says Misaka as she goes back even further."

"Bfee! Says Misaka #19090 as she expresses her shock at the current direction of the conversation."

The Sisters could play their own straight man.

Misaka #10032 began scratching her temple.

"…Actually, the project that created the Misakas was split between two stages: the Radio Noise Project and the Level 6 Shift Project, says Misaka #10032 as she lets things get even more complicated within her head. Which project's acceptance should be under consideration?"

"Well, shouldn't that just be whichever one was first? says Misaka #10039 as she

vaguely expresses her estimation."

"Technically, the former wanted a full Level 5 and the latter wanted mass produced experimental subjects, so getting a proper definition may be difficult, says Misaka #13577 as she stealthily adds to the confusion."

"Come to think of it, whatever happened to Full Tuning, #00000, who was created by Amai Ao and cut off from the network? says Misaka #19090 as she lays out a new piece of foreshadowing."

The four girls decided that they didn't understand the whole zodiac signs thing and gained the positive view that they would open up their futures on their own.

However…

"…Misaka has found this, says Misaka #10032 as she adds more fuel to the fire."

"?"

"?"

"?"

The three girls turned her way and saw a different magazine in #10032's hand. A page in the back of the magazine had a corner even smaller than the horoscope from before.

It was a blood type horoscope.

"…What are they doing?" asked a young nurse who was watching the 4 girls from a distance.

The frog-faced doctor next to her took a sip of coffee from a paper cup and responded.

"It looks like they're arguing."

"Well, yes. But still…what are they doing?"

While those two had that mysterious conversation, the 4 girls with the exact same face were arguing.

“Mh! The love fortune for Type AB isn’t bad! reports Misaka #10032!!”

“Yes, but Misaka is Type AB too, so hers isn’t bad either! reports Misaka #10039!!”

“No! Of all of the Misakas, this Misaka is Type Super AB, so Misaka’s fortune is super not bad! says Super Misaka #13577 as she snatches it all up for herself!!”

“No, no. This Misaka gets the last laugh, says Misaka #19090 as she declares herself to be the supreme ruler of the AB World!!”

As they argued, they grabbed at each other’s hair, pulled on each other’s clothes, and grabbed the magazine away from each other. There were panties visible everywhere.

The young nurse spoke with a blank expression on her face.

“Those girls have a giant network that they use by converting brain waves to electric signals, right?”

“Yes, that’s the Misaka Network. Why?”

“I had taken that to mean that each individual one had an ego, but the giant network functioned as a single brain that held a single will that intervened with the individuals.”

“Yes, that’s how it works.”

“…And they still argue?”

It seemed the young nurse didn’t understand how that could be possible.

The frog-faced doctor took a sip of coffee and stuck out his tongue because it was slightly too bitter.

“Normal people choose a single option from several and act on it. For instance, if you see a cake in front of you while dieting, you have two thoughts: ‘I want to

eat it even if it will make me fat’ and ‘I won’t eat it because it will make me fat’.”

“Y-yes…”

“A normal person whittles down the multiple options one by one until only one remains and then acts on that option. We only have one body, so we can only act on one view even if we hold several.”

“…So you’re saying that’s what that is?”

“Yes. Those girls have a single large will that intervenes with the many physical bodies, so they don’t need to narrow their thoughts down to only one opinion. This doesn’t work with everything of course, but with options like the cake example they don’t have to choose because they can choose both. After all, they actually have multiple bodies.”

“…”

The young nurse looked back at the girls whose panties were on full display.

Was it possible she was viewing a very precious sight?

“As a result, they have a single large will unilaterally intervening in their minds and the different individuals have started to choose different paths of action. That’s why they can have conversations and they can fight while still all being Misakas. I think it’s a good thing. It’s very human.”

It seemed the frog-faced doctor didn’t really mind.

He lightly rocked the paper cup full of bitter coffee back and forth and continued speaking in a casual-sounding voice.

“I pray that this will lead to them growing individual personalities.”

Chapter 14: The Dance between Goalkeeper and Intruder. The Third Friday of September.

To be clear, Uiharu Kazari is not superhuman.

“?”

It was afterschool and she was in the Judgment’s 177th Branch munching on a cookie. She looked as if she had realized something and then looked towards the notebook computer sitting atop a steel desk.

(Mgh!? Someone troublesome is here!!)

It was an intruder.

However, this was not someone breaking into Uiharu’s computer or to Judgment’s 177th Branch. Currently, electronic attack after electronic attack was being carried out on the Bank that managed all of Academy City’s data and Uiharu was carrying out counter measures. One link in the Bank’s defenses was to send all data being sent to the Bank through Judgment’s large server first.

Some data was ignoring that detour and heading directly for the Bank.

That flow of data was impossible through normal operations.

Someone was hacking.

And it was no normal hacking. This access wasn’t being made through a security hole that Uiharu hadn’t thought of before. And she had already filled all the boring holes anyway.

That meant…

Misaka Mikoto, a young lady from the prestigious psychic power development school Tokiwadai Middle School, was sitting on a station bench. The portable terminal she was operating in her hand was connected to the network via a wireless LAN.

She was one of the only seven Level 5s in Academy City.

She was Railgun.

She was ranked 3rd out of the entire city and she had the highest class electricity control power.

Mikoto was controlling various things by directly touching the screen with her index finger, but the screen was displaying a lot more going on than what her finger could be doing. Symbols and strings of characters were scrolling by too quickly to easily read and Mikoto wasn't paying attention to each and every one. She had started picturing the machine in her head and the computer was taking care of everything on its own almost as an after effect.

Mikoto was attempting to access Academy City's Bank.

She had made it this far in a few times before, but this time no one was stopping her. She was sure people on the other side were probably concerned that someone might have hacked in, but she hadn't done enough to give them a reason to disconnect from the network and isolate the Bank.

(…Well, it must be a difficult decision. Cutting off access to the Bank would bring about a greater time loss than stopping the trains for an emergency.)

While staring at the windows appearing and disappearing, Mikoto exhaled softly.

She wanted to use her full power and just get it over with, but she didn't want to destroy her own machine either.

(…Hmm.)

Uiharu used her eyes to follow the data attempting to directly access the Bank and returned her half-eaten cookie to its plate.

(This has happened before. This time seems to be at a higher level though.)

She looked at the screen and exhaled.

She was seeing something that would be impossible to do by operating a computer in the normal way.

In other words, she was up against an esper hacker.

Academy City was a city of espers. That of course meant that there were tons of espers who could use their power to hack. Some read a user's mind to get their password, some used electricity to seize control of the computer, and some could even control the "information" directly.

It was difficult to drive back people like that while using a computer normally. The difference between a normal user and a hacker was how well one could use the visible system and how much of what was going on underneath one could read, but esper hackers had something even further underneath at their disposal.

However…

This was a city swarming with espers.

(If I hesitate here, how am I supposed to protect the peace of this city!?)

Uiharu renewed her resolve and rechecked the flow of data. The data was not going through the "shortest route" that Uiharu had previously set, so the hacker wasn't reading Uiharu's thoughts. Also, the data wasn't being removed while completely ignoring the defensive walls, so the hacker wasn't someone who could directly contact the information.

(That means…)

Most likely, she was up against an esper who could control electricity. However, electricity powers were popular, so it was near impossible to determine who the hacker was from just that.

"…"

Uiharu frowned and used her eyes to follow the pattern with which the data was

moving.

That little bit of interaction with the data brought the “flower” that the system was to her mind.

Currently, she was looking at the end of a root. She imagined the stalk and the leaves from there and then the flow of water and nutrients. It all created a large image of the whole flower in her head. This way of calculating within a kind of organization by imaging it from various angles was what Uiharu did when she hacked.

If Uiharu Kazari actually had a special ability, she might have been able to construct a tremendous Personal Reality and display enormous power.

But…

(…)

Uiharu bit her lip.

Her image that began from the tip of the roots suddenly burst when she had reached the stalk. Her opponent must have been using extremely high-level calculations, because she couldn’t read the path taken by the event she was seeing happen in front of her eyes or the Personal Reality causing it.

And if she didn’t understand what her opponent was doing, she wouldn’t be able to come up with a way to stop it.

(What do I do…?)

Uiharu’s fingers wandered around above the keyboard.

It was a similar action to when someone couldn’t decide what item to choose and it was a symbol of her distress.

“Okay, okay. Looks like it’s around here,” muttered Mikoto as she stared at the quickly changing screen.

Currently, she was performing a standard password cracking.

Just because she had the power to control electricity didn't mean that she could break through every kind of security with it. In fact, Academy City was full of espers so special defenses against that kind of irregular attack had been developed.

However, no matter how one thought about it, someone with a psychic power had the advantage over someone who didn't.

Of course, she didn't break through everything just by using her power.

After all, there was no reason to get fixated on doing so.

She would use her power to overcome security that was difficult to break with a normal computer and she would use the computer for the special anti-esper security. Mikoto was hacking into various targets using the most effective method at each point.

And then her work was complete.

Mikoto tapped a few keys and was through the final piece of security.

(Now then, where is that data…oh?)

Mikoto stopped moving.

As she stared at the screen, only her eyebrows twitched.

The screen was displaying the mass of data in the Bank as it was being encrypted at overwhelming speed.

(No way…)

From the characteristics of the random strings of characters the symbols and numbers were turning into, it was most likely Omega Secret. Omega Secret was a random number encryption that had won an absolute encryption contest held on Academy City's internet.

(No, no, you've gotta be kidding me!)

That absolute encryption contest wasn't something with any actual benefit like letting a computer play chess with a human. In fact, it was famous for having unpleasant effects. The Omega Secret created in that contest was famous for being unbreakable, but the data was randomly encrypted making it impossible for even the program itself to decrypt it. It was said that something encrypted by that monster would take even an Academy City supercomputer 200 years to decrypt.

(What idiot decided to use that!?)

The most troublesome part about Omega Secret was that every file from the smallest to the largest would take the same 200 years to decrypt. The differences between each file was made up for with random numbers so there was no pattern to decrypting that could be used on all files once it was discovered. After decrypting one file, the next one would need another 200 years.

The entirety of the Bank was being encrypted, so she couldn't even tell where the data she wanted was within the gigantic archive. The only way to ensure she had the data she wanted had changed from choosing what she wanted and stealing it to preparing a gigantic databank the size of that storage server and transferring every piece of that ridiculous amount of data.

There was nothing she could do.

The mere act of preparing a large server like that would allow her to be tracked. And even if she had the server, who knows how many hours it would take to transfer all that data. The people watching the network would never miss a data transfer that huge.

However…

(…They're crazy. The Bank server's control and maintenance files are being encrypted, too!! That gigantic server is going to be completely useless after this!!)

Even a long-time high-class girl like her paled at the thought of how much the machines used for the Bank must cost. All of that had been unhesitatingly thrown away. Opening up the server's case and pouring water in seemed like it would cause less damage than this.

(If they’re willing to fight back like this, they must have the data on the Bank backed up somewhere else. If I attack there, I might be able to get that data…)

Mikoto looked back at the disaster occurring on her screen.

She had the feeling that her opponent would stop at nothing to stop her. Even if she managed to reach that back up data, she couldn’t help but feel that her opponent wouldn’t hold back.

(A hacker does best when she isn’t found.)

Mikoto couldn’t decide what to do for a bit, but she finally ruffled her hair with one hand as if she had given up.

(If I stick to that theory, I should withdraw for now. I’d rather not go so far as to be taken out along with whoever that moron is.)

“Well, I guess that’s it for today,” said Uiharu Kazari as she stared at the screen.

If the intruder had stuck around a little longer, she might have been able to trace him, but she had still been fairly successful. Instead of chasing the intruder too far, she should analyze his attack pattern and put up some defenses against it.

It might seem doubtful that kind of normal method would work on a hacker that directly controlled electricity, but it would. The intruder was doing nothing more than using his power to enter a hidden part of the system. He only looked like he could do anything because he could freely move through those areas of exception.

As long as the intruder was only sending and receiving electronic information, Uiharu just had to find those exceptions and fill the holes there. That kind of normal method was more than enough to prevent an esper from hacking in.

(This has been quite educational. That intruder was quite skilled, but in the end it added to my skill.)

As she was thinking, Uiharu reached her hand for the cookie sitting on its plate.

“…Uiharu.”

She turned around at that whispered voice and saw her fellow Judgment member, Shirai Kuroko, standing in the entrance to the room. Shirai was hanging her head down and Uiharu tilted her head to the side in puzzlement. Her pigtailed colleague pointed towards the door with her thumb and continued to whisper.

“You went too far, so it’s time for your lecture, you idiot.”

Chapter 15: Art is Divided between Geniuses and Eccentrics. The Fourth Friday of September.

A great number of the Anglican Church's battle members were gathered in a women's dorm in London. One of them was Kanzaki Kaori, a woman with her long black hair tied in a ponytail.

As always, she had Shichiten Shichitou, her Japanese sword that was over 2 meters long, hanging at her hip.

She was trembling alone in the dining hall with a leaflet in her hands that said, "The scabbard is a lovely and stylish outfit for your sword. Wouldn't you like to dress up your beloved sword even more beautifully?"

The pretty four-colored leaflet had a number of sample photos in small boxes and animals made from black cloth and finely cut vermillion maple and gold leaf much like would be seen on the outside of a multi-tiered bento box.

Kanzaki heard a gulping noise.

She did not realize that it was the sound of herself swallowing.

(…M-mhhh…!! I-it's true I was thinking that this plain black scabbard wasn't enough. If I just got that Vermillion Maple or the Yellow Crane…N-no, no!! The core of the Amakusa-style Church needs to draw out the magical meanings of the objects around her and use them! If I just change the meaning of the scabbard so simply…b-but…the meaning of this Evening Cherry Tree might not be a problem…)

The always cool and collected Yamato Nadeshiko that was Kanzaki Kaori continued to groan in indecision. As if to kick her while she was down, a different leaflet slipped from her hand and landed on one of the dining hall tables.

This one said, “Armor is the ultimate partner that protects your back. You should feel the breath of this wonderful partner that will stay with you no matter what predicament you are in.”

“M-mhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

Kanzaki glared at the pictures on the advertisement that looked like the dolls from the Boys’ May Festival.

(I suppose an entire set of armor is a bit much…but with just an arm or a leg or even a breastplate I could wear it under my normal clothes and…no, no!!)

Kanzaki continued like this until she suddenly returned to her senses.

She looked up, cleared her throat, and slowly put the leaflets aside. It was no time to have her heart stolen by those leaflets that had been left there almost as a trap.

Kanzaki moved from the dining hall to the kitchen area.

As a large amount of food had to be prepared, the kitchen was a fairly large area. It had a business-use oven, a business-use refrigerator, and a business-use sink. Kanzaki entered the kitchen that was full of business-use objects, opened the large silver fridge, and pulled out a small storage container from the back.

It contained the leftovers bits of a sea bream.

Kanzaki had been in charge of the food that day and she had saved the sea bream bones. She had used a kitchen knife to scrape off the little bit of flesh from the thick bones.

The small Sister Angelene who was always sneaking food had commented “Wah! Are you that much of a glutton?”, so Kanzaki had been feeling a little down, but now she could admit that Angelene was exactly right. This was one of her favorite foods.

Kanzaki took the last little bits of rice from the large rice cooker one would usually see at a school, put it in a rice bowl, and then put the sea bream leftovers in the center. She then took the broth she had made by boiling the bones and head of the sea bream, put it in a small teapot, and poured it into the rice bowl.

She slowly put down the small teapot and brought her hands together in front of her face in a small clap making sure not to make any noise.

“Hee hee. Hee hee hee. …Sea bream chazuke☆”

Kanzaki continued her excited silent clapping half feeling that someone should point out that she had used broth instead of tea, but it didn’t really matter. She simply preferred broth. Someone might complain that she wasn’t doing it right, but it wasn’t going to stop her.

She took some chopsticks from a cupboard and hurried back to the dining hall with her rice bowl. She was smiling widely and couldn’t keep her butt from swaying rhythmically while wrapped in her indigo-dyed yukata.

“Now then. Time to eat.”

“Hey, who’s eating something that smells delicious this late at night!?”

“It smells so good!! It’s making me so hungry I can’t sleep!!”

Kanzaki started panicking once she heard a couple of female voices suddenly come from the ceiling. She heard hurried footsteps getting closer and closer.

She only had one sea bream chazuke, so there was no way she could comply with the request that was sure to come now that those girls had smelled it.

That left only one path.

(At this rate, they’ll start fighting over it…!?)

Kanzaki Kaori built up her resolve, grabbed the rice bowl that still had steam rising from it, put her lips to the edge, and stared quickly moving the chopsticks. Her eyes filled with tears, but it was hardly the time to worry about that. That was the only way to stop a pointless fight from occurring. It wasn’t that she was afraid of having someone else take the sea bream chazuke from her.

Kanzaki threw the empty rice bowl and chopsticks in a dishpan full of water and disposed of the small bit of broth still left in the teapot and pot. Finally, she sprayed a deodorizing spray around the area.

It all only took about 30 seconds.

Just as she straightened up after putting the can of deodorizing spray back in its proper spot, the starving nuns noisily entered the kitchen.

As expected, the first one in was the short nun with braided blonde hair, Angelene. She was sniffing around with her small nose.

“K-Kanzaki-san! Did you see some mysterious person with food that smelled amazingly good wandering around here!?”

“N-no. I didn’t see a mysterious old man delivering ramen or anything.”

“…Odd. I could have sworn the smell was coming from around here…”

Angelene wandered around the kitchen sniffing like a war dog that had lost its prey. Kanzaki slowly turned her gaze away from Angelene and the other nuns behind her and looked to the window. She noticed a grain of rice on her mouth and hurriedly pushed it into her mouth with a finger.

As all this was going on, the tall nun with cat’s eyes, Lucia, entered the kitchen having noticed all the noise. She began speaking to Angelene.

“Sister Angelene. …What is going on here?”

“This is the autumn of art! And so I thought I’d try my own hand at art.”

Kanzaki looked over at them questioningly and saw a choco cornet in Angelene’s hand. The bread had three silver-colored forks stuck into either side. The look in Lucia’s eyes eloquently expressed her anger over the wasted food and that she was going to spank Angelene 100 times later.

Angelene spoke while holding the dessert bread with its wing-like forks.

“This is an expression of the anger swirling around inside me.”

“I see…”

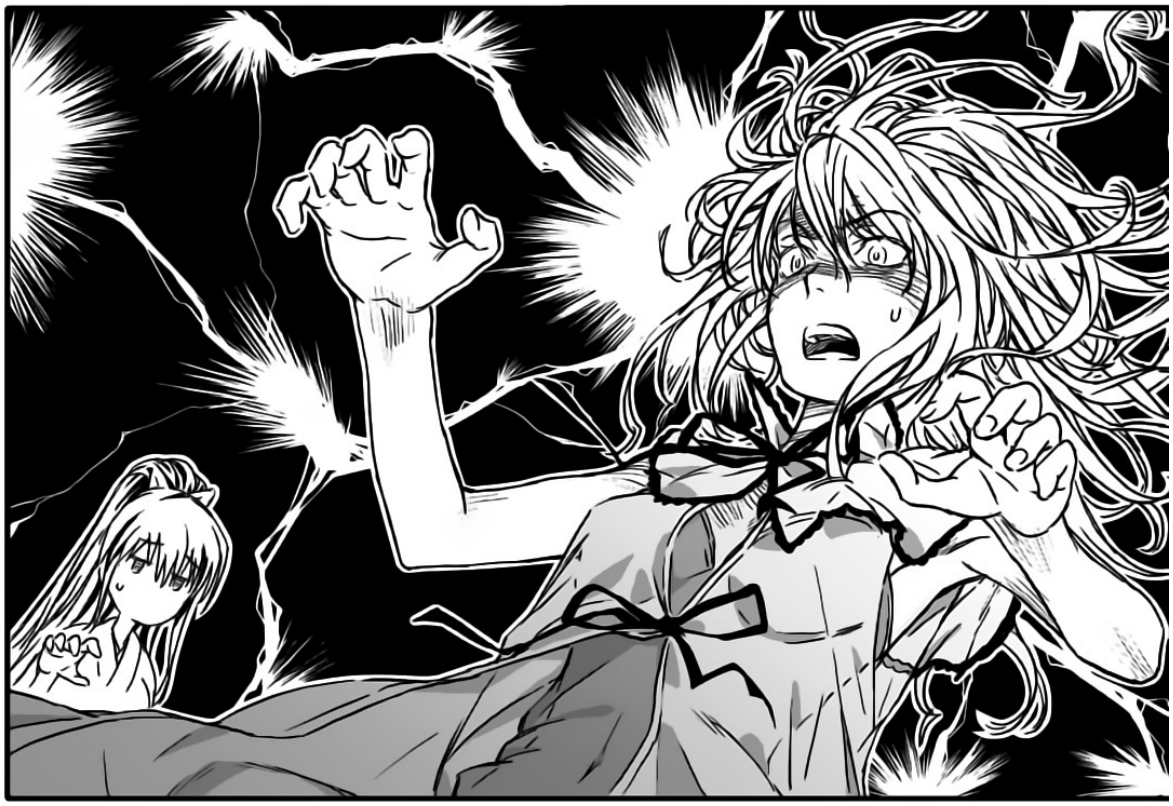
“The anger in my heart wants to leap from my chest, but energy is needed for it to do so. The exchange of energy means that anger directed towards others

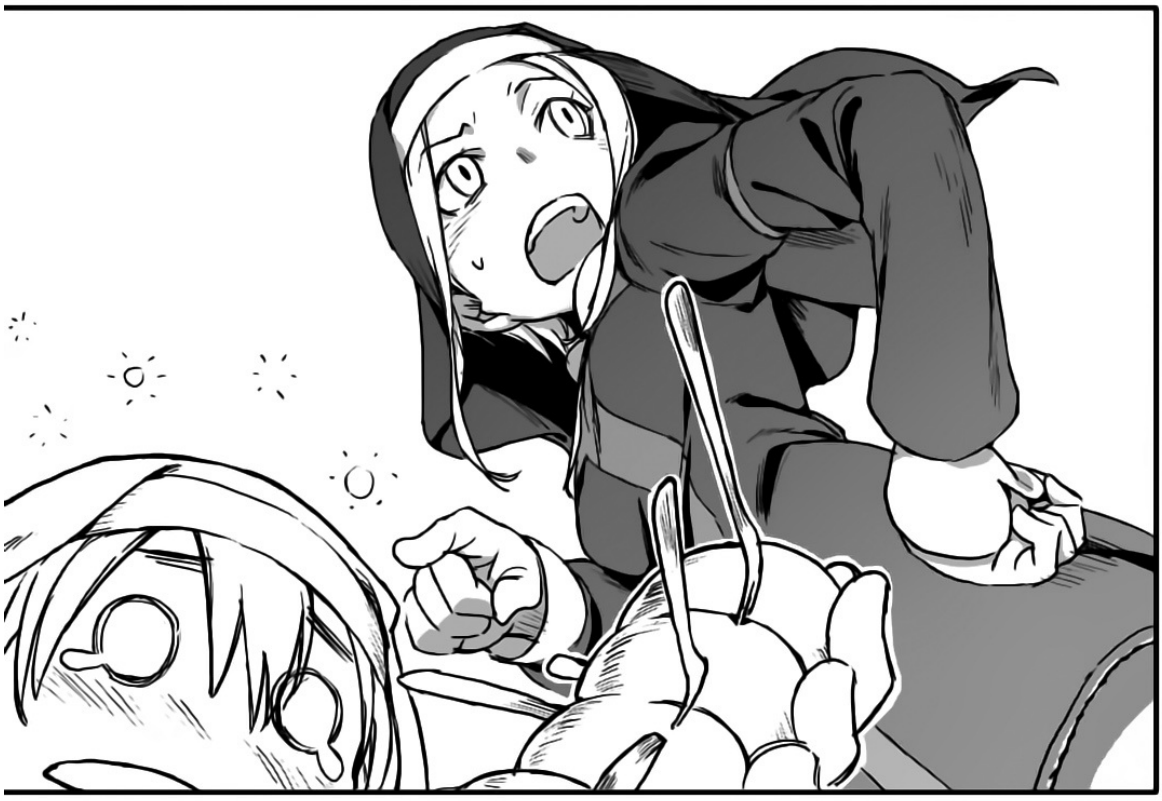
comes back to you. Basically, what I’m trying to say is that getting too angry makes you even hungrier!!!!!!”

“…”

“Okay, now that Master Artist Angelene’s audio commentary is over, I’ll be spanking you 100 times,” said Lucia with a heavy sigh.

That was when Sherry Cromwell, a Gothic Lolita magician with light brown skin and blonde hair like a lion’s mane, entered the kitchen.





Sherry was the manager of the magical side of the Royal Academy of Arts and, when she entered the kitchen, she completely ignored the issue of Kanzaki and the sea bream chazuke and looked over at the dessert bread with forks (Title: Anger Burns the Self) that Angelene was holding in both hands as she was being spanked.

“Art…!?”

“D-don’t make strange jokes that are so difficult to understand!! Look, now that you’ve said that, Sister Angelene is yelling out as if she has had her eyes opened to some mysterious truth!!”

The real reason Angelene was yelling and opening her eyes wide was because Lucia had added 80% more force to her spanking as she snapped at Sherry, but Lucia didn’t seem to realize that.

Meanwhile, Sherry must have had great respect for the mysterious dessert bread with forks that frankly expressed human emotion because she started putting on thin gloves as if she were about to handle a true antique.

“Hey! Nuns number one and number two!”

“Don’t refer to us like we’re levers on the toilet!!”

“Don’t refer to us like we’re levers on the toilet!!”

“…C-can I touch that dessert bread? No!! I understand! I’m well aware I’m making an inelegant request!! But three dimensional objects always make me want to look at them from every angle!!”

It seemed the brown sculptor was suffering, but Lucia said she could have it as long as she would actually eat it. However, as soon as Sherry took it she started speaking as if she was moaning.

“The direction of the forks…this wing shape… I see. This says that the anger over an empty stomach empties the stomach further…!!”

All of the nuns left the kitchen muttering that they just didn’t understand artists. Kanzaki left along with them and sighed as she walked along the hallway in her

yukata. Then she tilted her head to the side in puzzlement.

(Huh? Why did we end up on the topic of art?)

Chapter 16: There is a Reason They Do Not Look Like Mothers. The Fifth Friday of September.

There was a members only sports gym a short distance from the hottest spot in Kanagawa prefecture.

The walls and ceiling around the indoor pool were all made of glass and the pool was a more extravagant and precise version of the standard rectangular pools found in schools. The types of the guests were quite mixed. There were some athletes who were working to shave off 0.1 seconds from their time, there were some housewives being taught how to swim by young instructors, and there were some people trying to stay healthy or trying to help their diet.

Misaka Misuzu was swimming in the outermost lane of that pool.

Misuzu looked to be in her twenties, but she was actually the mother of a 14 year old daughter. She swam in the pool after her university lectures every day. She was exercising because, “When I slack off on my health, it immediately comes back to bite me in the ass.” Despite exercising for such a dubious reason, her speed was amazingly fast. The female athlete in the lane next to her decided to treat Misuzu as her rival, but the athlete didn’t stand a chance against Misuzu who was plunging through the water like a torpedo.

And yet Misuzu’s thoughts were in a completely different direction.

(…Not good.)

She raised her head with a splash as her hand struck the edge of the pool and sighed despite the instructor looking shocked at her time.

(This swimsuit is too efficient. What’s the point of exercising in something as resistant as water with something like this?)

What Misuzu was wearing was more the kind of black wetsuit surfers loved than it was a swimsuit. The arms and legs cut off around the elbows and knees respectively and it emphasized her body lines much like a one-piece swimsuit.

She had ordered it without really thinking about it when she saw it was a swimsuit that let you swim fast, but it regulated the flow of water too well. It would have been great for a serious swim meet, but Misuzu just wasn't the kind of customer it had been made for.

Then…

"Oh, are your classes done for the day?"

"Ah, hello, Kamijou-san."

Misuzu took her hand from the water and waved it in response to the voice that called out to her from the poolside as she supported herself on the coarse rope.

The Kamijou-san she addressed was a woman named Kamijou Shiina. It seemed she had moved to the area recently and had become quite a celebrity in the neighborhood as the "flying young lady" because of her powered paragliding hobby.

Also, despite being referred to as a "young lady", Shiina was a mother with a child in high school. Misuzu guessed that Shiina was even older than her, but the resilience of her skin and other such things were quite excellent. The arms and legs stretching from her graceful white one piece swimsuit (it only looked graceful. It was actually quite aggressive in every possible way) looked like those of a teenager.

"Kamijou-san, are you doing the same thing you always do?"

"Yes. My hobby requires that I train my lungs quite a bit."

Misuzu checked Shiina's upper arms and thighs during this casual conversation and grumbled in her heart over how perfect her body was.

(…D-damn. What kind of stretches does she do to stay that young looking?)

Of course, Misuzu was quite beautiful herself. She looked young enough that she

could mix in with the students and attend university lectures without seeming out of place. However, she knew that people were putting hidden extra words in their comments about how young she looked such as “she’s so beautiful (for someone who isn’t a beauty)”, “she looks so young (for someone with a kid)”, or “she looks like a college student (even though she’s a middle aged woman)”. The monster known as old age had opened its mouth and was trying to swallow Misuzu whole as she ran as quickly as she could away from it!!

Misuzu just couldn’t help but be jealous of Shiina.

Because she went to so much effort, she could tell. Kamijou Shiina was older than her and yet she did not go to any of the effort she did. And even so, she had youthful looks to spare.

“Here I go,” said Shiina as she held onto a kickboard with both hands, stuck her face in the water, and just lay floating there like a corpse.

(…Maybe I should get Mikoto-chan to introduce me to an amazing health machine from Academy City. No, no. If I just diet, it’ll eliminate the fat that gives you glossy skin and I’ll just be all dried out...)

Misuzu continued muttering into the water until Shiina was done with her corpse mode and the two women moved to the poolside.

“Ah, living alone as a housewife is surprisingly comfortable and enjoyable. Of course, that’s only because I know he’s coming back periodically.”

“Oh, Misaka-san, did your husband move elsewhere for his job?”

“Mmm, I wouldn’t really say he moved…I just never know where he is or what he’s doing.”

“Mine still technically lives at home, but he has lots of overseas business trips. Also, he always comes back with weird souvenirs. I sometimes feel like he’s delving into some great unexplored area of the world.”

Misuzu and Shiina laughed together.

The two women did not know that their husbands (as well as the Tanaka-kun the new employee and the people they met on their journeys) were actually getting

into real trouble all over the world.

Drying herself with a long towel, Shiina suddenly spoke.

“I heard that my son’s school wasn’t having their midterms.”

“Hm? Oh, yeah. It’s the same for Mikoto-chan’s school. I think they said the grades for two terms were going to be decided at the final exams. She doesn’t feel that kind of pressure though, so she’ll do the same as ever.”

“Whether my Touma-san does the same as ever or not, he’ll still end up with supplementary lessons due to a failing grade.”

The two laughed and giggled, but then Misuzu suddenly realized something.

“…Our conversation certainly took a motherly turn, didn’t it?”

“Oh, but we are housewives after all.”

A college girl passing by looked at them quizzically, but that was nothing new.

Misuzu thought for a second before speaking.

“There’s been one thing that’s been bothering me for a while.”

“What is it?”

“Is what our kids do in Academy City really what you would call studying? That city uses leading edge technology to develop psychic powers.”

“Well, I suppose…” Shiina said before silently adding, “I’m not so sure that’s true with my Touma-san.”

“I wonder what it is that determines if someone can gain psychic powers or not?”

“Oh, I don’t really know anything about that, but doesn’t that have to do with genetics and DNA?”

“I suppose so,” said Misuzu as she nodded. “But then…”

“?”

“Nothing, I was just wondering if the fact that Mikoto-chan became Academy City’s #3 Level 5 meant that I could have electricity sparking from my bangs if I underwent the Curriculum.”

“My,” was Shiina’s refined expression of surprise.

Maybe it was because she had left her child to Academy City, but Misuzu’s thoughts continued on that path and ended up elsewhere.

“When I think about the possibility that there could be tons of people like that in the world, it gives me a mysterious feeling. My Mikoto-chan is ranked #3, but what if there were people all over the place who had even more amazing powers but no one realized it?”

With that last question, she was more speaking to herself than to Shiina.

Perhaps there were people who never realized their own ability and lived their entire life as a normal housewife. And perhaps there were people who thought they were normal people and yet they had used a mysterious power without even realizing it.

Perhaps there were powers that were not as easily noticed as having fire come from one’s hand or sending lightning from one’s bangs. Perhaps the everyday phenomena that people experienced such as having good instincts, having neater handwriting than the average person, looking younger than you actually were, or any other silly little “mysteries” had laws and theories behind them. Perhaps certain idiosyncrasies were actually special powers the people lived with.

“Oh, then how about you transfer to a university within Academy City?”

“Hmm. That does sound like fun, but someone my age can’t take part in the Curriculum that develops psychic powers,” Misuzu said with a laugh. “In the end, I don’t know the truth, but I feel that it would truly be wonderful if these dreams of mine were true.”

Chapter 17: B Movies and Unpolished Gemstones. The First Friday of October.

Due to various circumstances, Hamazura Shiage had quit Skill-Out and begun doing subordinate work for a small organization from the dark side of Academy City known as Item. Item had only four members, but those four were powerful enough that they received a large budget that came from somewhere or other.

This story begins with a request from Kinuhata Saiai, a girl of about twelve who was a member of that mysterious organization.

“Hamazura, Hamazura. Can you get me an ID super fast?”

“It may have been temporary, but I once led a Skill-Out group of over 100 people. Why are you giving me odd jobs like that?”

“Quit complaining. I super need an ID.”

“Damn it. So you’re asking me to make one? I suppose it depends on the kind you want. I can get you an IC card right away, but a passport will take some time.”

Hamazura was quite an outlaw, and he didn’t deny that he could do it.

Kinuhata waved her small hands quickly.

“I don’t need something as super elaborate as that. I just need to fake my age, so I’m super okay with a student ID from some high school.”

“??? What kind of job do you need that for?”

“It’s an extremely super important mission,” Kinuhata responded to Hamazura’s simple question. “I super need to see a movie rated R18 that’s opening this week!!”

And that was how the first job of Hamazura's second life was decided.

Kinuhata Saiai's hobby was watching movies.

The term "movies" could refer to a large number of genres and ranks, but she was a movie enthusiast who was drawn in by very obscure ones. If you told someone the title of the movies she watched, their reaction wouldn't even be "Never heard of it"; it would be "What?".

"…Is there really a movie theater here?"

"We're only going to a B movie this time. This place is super good for B movies. If you wanted to go to a C movie, you'd super have to go even deeper."

"Uehh…" Hamazura groaned.

They moved from the main road into a back lane, then into an even smaller path that branched off, and they continued on and on down narrower and narrower paths until they reached a place that seemed like no more than a small gap. There, they found a building that looked like it was being crushed by all the multi-tenant buildings above it.

The theater was in an area so thick with buildings that it would be hard to check on that place with a satellite. It seemed to be Kinuhata Saiai's secret spot. Of course, since it was a theater for specialty films, it only showed minor films that you couldn't catch somewhere else if you missed it. It held an aura that just told amateurs to go to sleep.

Kinuhata put her hands on her hips and snorted in excitement.

"You did get the ID for me, but I wanted something else to reinforce my appearance. If two people with IDs buy a ticket at once, it'll super trick the lady selling the tickets."

And so, the two of them managed to make it past the cautious gaze of the ticket seller who seemed like a bookworm of a librarian, and entered the theater building. They walked down a dirty Western-style hallway that felt right out of a horror game, and opened the double doors to the actual theater.

The building itself was small, but the theater was even smaller; it was like a slightly bigger school AV room, and the multi-level seats reminded Hamazura of the university lecture rooms he'd occasionally see on TV.

But something else caught his attention.

“…Hey. I thought you said this was the only place in Japan you could see this movie. So, why is there no one here fifteen minutes before it starts?”

“Ahhn☆”

Hamazura looked over in shock after hearing a heavy breath in response to his question. He saw Kinuhata Saiai looking like she was about to faint with her folded hands on her cheek.

“I’m the first guest at an exclusive screening. That means I’m the only one that understands how super wonderful this film is!! Yes, yes, I know it’s only a delusion, but right now, what the director is trying to get across super only belongs to meeeeee!!”

While the idiot went off in an odd direction on her own, Hamazura went to buy some popcorn. When he returned to the seats right in the middle of the theater, Kinuhata laughed scornfully at the popcorn.

“Hah. Caramel popcorn will make you super thirsty, so it’s a horrible choice for the theater. You super don’t understand, do you, Hamazura?”

“Then quit reaching over and munching on it even more than I am. Here, I got a drink, too.”

“Oh, is that supposed to be a counter-measure for the thirst? A drink, especially a large carbonated one like that, will just make you need to use the bathroom during the movie. Hamazura, in the end, you’re just super Hamazura-y.”

“I don’t want to hear that from a girl who took the drink from me and is now swinging her feet around under the seat.”

Eventually, the theater’s lights lowered. A commonplace electronic buzzer sounded, and the screen lit up. Usually, the first ten minutes would drag on with all the previews from the distribution company, but here, the movie started right

away. Apparently, they weren't even able to introduce other films.

It was the golden age of CG, yet the caption for the title looked like it had been cut out with scissors and directly placed on the film. Hamazura decided to ask a simple question.

"Hey."

"What is it that requires interrupting the super greatest moment of my life, Hamazura?"

"…We're only thirty seconds in, and there are a whole bunch of youthful zombies who've only had their faces made blue with make-up. How am I supposed to react to that?"

"You super don't know how to enjoy a B movie, do you?"

"Normally, talking during a movie is strictly prohibited, but whatever," started Kinuhata as she munched on the popcorn Hamazura had bought. "It's expected for a B movie to not look so good; it's a film people super desperately made with no money or personnel. It isn't going to look polished without a lot put into it."

"Then what are we doing in these tiny economy class-like seats in this small theater? We should just go to a huge theater and watch a huge hit from Hollywood."

"Really? The huge hits may break records again and again, but finding a shining treasure of a B or C movie sticks with you more. It may seem stupid at first, but before you know it, you're super enjoying it."

"Sigh. I just don't get it."

Hamazura decided that it was no use asking someone who was enjoying something from the start what was so good about it. It was like having the appeal of a band you had no interest in explained to you at length.

So a surprisingly good B or C movie shines more than a shitty blockbuster, huh?

He felt like the same could be said for them.

Some people in the world had all sorts of abilities, but how many people were actually given a situation to display those abilities? How many people had undisplayed abilities that were hidden because they lacked a large budget, an excellent staff, or the proper facilities and equipment?

It had been determined that Hamazura Shiage was a Level 0, but it was possible that was just due to a problem in how the teachers had tried to bring out his ability. If Kinuhata Saiai went somewhere with more sunshine, perhaps her power would display itself in a healthier way. There were only seven Level 5s in Academy City, but was that really all? Perhaps in the large world stretching out beyond Academy City, there were people that possessed the qualities to become an eighth or a ninth, but no one knew it and they ended up selling flowers by the roadside.

Thinking like that, maybe the magnum-toting police officer shooting the blue zombies displayed on the screen of that tiny theater was a challenge to that unfair world. Maybe the message was, “Fate may have kept me from fully displaying my ability, but I’m still going to enjoy my life more than anyone else in the world.”

“…”

The information on the screen became a moving scene inside Hamazura.

Once he had started letting those emotions enter him, he felt that the way he viewed the film changed. He wasn’t feeling sympathy, but an odd sense of understanding. He couldn’t say that it was a good film, but he felt like he could expect it to get good. It was a mysterious feeling that wasn’t really trust and wasn’t really uplifting. It was a continuous feeling that made him want to search out this director’s work.

This must be what Kinuhata is so drawn to.

Hamazura casually looked to the side. Kinuhata didn’t notice his gaze while her face was covered in the reflected light from the screen. As she focused on the screen, her expression was one that could be seen as a type of earnestness.

Then, she suddenly opened her mouth.

“Ahh. This is super boring.”

Hamazura Shiage fell out of his seat, scattering caramel popcorn everywhere.

“Heeeeeeeeeeyyyyyyyyyy!! You had me fake an ID and come with you to this minor movie!! You’re the one that was going on excitedly about how much you love movies, so can’t you at least look like you’re enjoying yourself!?”

“This is weird. When I read the pamphlet, it sounded super good, but about ten minutes in, I lost interest. I guess movies really are something you have to see before you can tell how good they are. Very deep, very deep…”

“Wait a second. Then what was that feeling of understanding B movies and sense of identifying with the movie that was growing within me!?”

“What? What kind of understanding could you get from a super crappy movie like this? I at least know you definitely can’t learn how to enjoy B movies here.”

“…!?”

After having his question dodged, the door to Hamazura Shiage’s heart slammed shut for the movie. As if to kick him while he was down, Kinuhata continued to speak while yawning.

“Yawwwn... Ah, the heroine is super definitely going to die in twenty minutes; the staff's been giving all sorts of signs that they want to just kill her off.”

“Have you already cut off all empathy for her!? I-I say she won’t die!! The heroine will survive this zombie hell and see the morning sun with the protagonist!!”

“Then let’s make this a super bet. I wager a pack of gum she dies.”

“She won’t die!! After all, a brave heroine that doesn’t speak much like that matches my tastes perfectly!!”

As he spoke, a portion of the screen turned crimson as she was eaten. Instead of dying instantly, her skin turned paler and paler.

Hamazura buried his head in his hands, and Kinuhata Saiai’s unmotivated voice rang out through the theater.

“I super got some gum!”

When going to a movie, go with someone who won’t give up on it halfway through.

Chapter 18: Worthy of Carrying On That Name. *The First Friday of October.*

“I finally found you, Hanzou-sama,” quietly spoke a ninja girl, a chain wrapped all around her body.

She was in the above-ground section of District 22. Unlike the other districts, almost 100% of District 22’s functionality as a city was underground, so the above-ground area was entirely covered by a wind farm. A metal framework that was built up to about thirty stories above ground spread out in every direction like a jungle gym, and wind turbines were placed all over it.

Standing amid that odd turbine-filled scenery was a boy with a bandana wrapped around his head.

His name was Hanzou, and he was leaning up against a piece of metal framework that was standing up on end like a pillar. He was staring at a girl named Kuruwa who was wearing a yellow mini-yukata that had a see-through midriff.

“Really. I went out of the way to disguise my status and hide in this city, yet you still spend half a year running after me. What has you so intent on hunting me down?”

“The revival of the pure line of Hattori and the revival of the Iga,” Kuruwa responded without hesitation.

However, Hanzou only sighed when he heard that.

“I think you’re a little confused about what a ninja is.”

“…”

“A ninja was originally a bandit hired by some powerful military commander; it

wasn’t something that had ‘pure lines’ or anything. Sure, some of that started later, but the farther you look into our origin, the more it becomes clear that a ninja can really just be anyone.”

Hanzou put his hands in his pockets as he spoke.

“Listen up, Kuruwa. A ninja should be like a weed and think like a poisonous insect and have a supporting role… By the time we have ‘pure lines’, we can’t survive in this world. Do you know why? We live hidden in the darkness, so if we give off that much light, people will send a concentrated attack on that light and kill us all.”

“That just shows that we ninja are afraid of influential people. But an age where we can move on more efficiently has come.”

“Do you want a place to be that badly?” said Hanzou, shaking his head.

What was truly unfortunate was that he thought she was an idiot, yet still understood how she felt.

“Look, let me give you a tip: learn to be like a weed, think like a poisonous insect, and honor your own supporting role. Weeds are everywhere, we will never be rid of poisonous insects, and the supporting roles blend into the background. Taking all of that together and condensing it gives you the essence of what a ninja is.”

“So, you refuse to understand.”

“Well, you’re not putting much effort into convincing me.”

“Then…”

A metallic noise was heard from Kuruwa’s sleeve. Her left arm was bare up to the shoulder, but her right one was covered by a long sleeve. When she moved even slightly, the chain wrapped around her body could be heard.

“If I cannot convince you, I will force you to surrender and make you become a part of the Hattori revival by my own hand.”

“That’s a rather extreme proposal. Do you want to have my babies or

something?”

“If it is necessary, yes. Even if it is by force.”

Hanzou sighed at Kuruwa’s completely serious response.

“Are you going to pull out a gun?”

“I-I stopped doing that. I was told it was not ninja-like.”

“?”

“A-also, guns are complex, so their operation can become unstable, and there are ways for others to intentionally cause such instability.”

Hanzou looked puzzled, and Kuruwa spoke as calmly as she could.

“There are some guns that can be made to fail by bending the magazine by as little as 1 mm. I felt it was better to face you with something simpler.”

A loud metallic noise rang out.

A sickle about 30 cm long flew out from Kuruwa’s sleeve. The chain wrapped around her body came off, and the end was connected to the sickle. The other end of the chain was at the metal shackle around her ankle.

“A kusarigama.” Hanzou narrowed his eyes with his hands still in his pockets. “That isn’t a ninja weapon. It is an unconventional hidden weapon, but it stands out too much.”

“…”

Kuruwa did not respond.

However, this was not because she was trying to defeat him silently without exchanging words.

It was because Hanzou had leapt straight towards her with tremendous speed.

Kuruwa gasped and attempted to fall back, but Hanzou had already taken his final step forward. At some point, he had taken his right hand out of his pocket.

He brought his hand back as if readying a punch.

However, there was something shining up his sleeve.

By the time she noticed that, his five fingers were already soaring towards her face.

“!?”

He was moving too quickly for her to move her entire body out of the way, so Kuruwa moved her head to the side, barely managing to avoid the incoming attack.

“An uchine…!!”

“*This* is a ninja weapon.”

In Hanzou’s hand was an extremely short arrow only about 15 cm long. This arrow was used for stabbing, not throwing. Because of this, this type of assassination blade was known as the world’s shortest spear.

As Hanzou’s next strike came, Kuruwa had no choice but to wrap the thick chain around her hand and use it for defense. The proper way to use a kusarigama was to create centrifugal force, throw the weighted chain, and then strike with the point of the sickle once the chain had been wrapped around the enemy’s weapon. However, with multiple attacks coming from right in front of her, she didn’t have time to swing the chain around to create centrifugal force.

Kuruwa gritted her teeth as she was forced to go on the defensive.

Hanzou wasn’t fighting seriously.

A true ninja technique would kill on the first strike, and if that failed, the ninja would quickly flee. If Hanzou was violating that theory, he must have been intending to quietly take care of her in order to silence her.

“You’re taking me lightly…!!”

Kuruwa abandoned her polite manner of speaking and swung the chain while she held it in both hands. The attack had no centrifugal force behind it and was a bit

like a jab, but Hanzou still had to swing his head back to avoid it.

In the opening that was created, Kuruwa managed to put a good amount of distance between them.

She moved behind the metal pillar to one of the wind turbines perhaps in order to get behind cover.

"…!!"

Hanzou immediately moved forward.

Without even giving Kuruwa a chance to compose herself, he used the momentum he obtained from swinging around the pillar to attack from the side.

The uchine's arrowhead stabbed forward, tearing through fluttering yellow cloth.

However, Hanzou's face darkened.

All that was there was the abandoned yukata.

He heard the sound of air being sliced.

He looked over and saw Kuruwa coming around the other side of the pillar as if she had gone around at the same time he had. She, now only wearing her underwear, had used the time that she had bought for herself to start swinging the chain around. The chain was travelling in a circle with a meter-long radius. Hanzou felt a sense of danger as he saw the weight go around again and again, building up speed and force.

Here it comes!!

The thrown chain was used for being wrapped around weapons, and the tip of the sickle was used for attacking once the enemy's movements had been cut off.

The one good thing about the kusarigama was that it was easy to guess its timing. As it swung around, amassing power, it had to be released at the right angle with the right timing or else the weight would fly off in some odd direction.

As the weighted chain spun, it made a whooshing noise.

Hanzou concentrated, and heard a conspicuously louder whoosh.

Dodge…!?

He moved his center of gravity to the side in preparation to jump, only to realize that Kuruwa hadn’t let go of the chain yet.

The louder whoosh he had heard had just been Kuruwa mimicking the noise with her mouth.

“Oh, shi—”

Hanzou had realized what had happened, but he couldn’t correct his altered center of gravity instantly. Due to this hesitation, when the chain actually soared towards him, he couldn’t move in time.

When she released the weighted chain, Kuruwa was convinced of her victory.

Hanzou could not avoid her attack. The thick chain would wrap around his right arm, and seal his movements. Then, Kuruwa just had to pull hard on the chain to unbalance him, and finish it with her sickle.

She had the absolute advantage, but she was wrapped in a kind of loneliness.

Was this all that Hanzou’s power, the power of the Hattori line, was?

As she ground her teeth, her chain headed accurately for Hanzou’s arm.

The chain headed for the area between his armpit and elbow, and started to wrap around his arm, clothes and all, like a snake.

However, the chain slipped right through Hanzou’s arm, and continued on at an unexpected angle.

“Wha—?”

Kuruwa stumbled forward from the momentum of the chain continuing on

unexpectedly.

Instead of wrapping around Hanzou's arm, the chain had flown right through it like it was made of Japanese paper. It took Kuruwa a second to realize what had happened.

Hanzou's right arm swayed loosely.

He had taken his arm out of the sleeve, and Kuruwa had attacked the empty sleeve.

Hanzou's actual right arm must have been in the main body of his jacket.

He couldn't attack with his uchine like that.

However, there was no guarantee that he only had an uchine in his right hand.

Hanzou dashed forward. Kuruwa attempted to defend with the chain, but it didn't work the way she wanted it to due to her body having been pulled forward by the momentum of the chain.

She only lost a split second due to that, but it was enough for Hanzou to make a decisive approach.

"E…"

In that instant, Kuruwa smiled for some reason.

As that strike approached before her eyes, the girl wishing for the revival of the Hattori line smiled.

"Excellent, Hanzou-sama!!"

Something was shining in Hanzou's left hand.

Hanzou silently looked down at Kuruwa's face.

The girl was collapsed on the ground wearing nothing but her underwear, but she had no obvious bleeding. At the last second, he had drawn in the uchine in his

hand and struck her with his fist.

“…Dammit. Don’t look so happy when I defeat you.”

Hanzou clicked his tongue.

She did not live like a traditional ninja. Her willingness to even die for a single goal was more of a samurai bushido kind of thing.

He couldn’t do that.

He was a ninja that was like a weed, like a poisonous insect, and had a supporting role. Even though he had permanently lost his friend Komaba and at least temporarily lost his friend Hamazura, he was just living his normal life alone.

A ninja wasn’t particularly strong or remarkable.

As the previous fight had shown, the way of the ninja was to use some kind of trick to bring the rhythm of battle in their favor, and then use an opening to attack from a blind spot.

Because of this, someone who was no one special like Hanzou wouldn’t take part in fights where he couldn’t take out the enemy in a single blow. He understood the basics of living as a spy.

What a pain in the ass…

Hanzou shook his head, and picked up Kuruwa’s abandoned mini-yukata. Even though she was a kunoichi trained in those techniques, he couldn’t let her stay there half-naked. He started to drape the mini-yukata over her like a sheet.

“…”

But then he felt a piece of paper.

He searched through the mini-yukata’s sleeve, and found a small report inside.

A Gemstone list…?

Even within Academy City, there were rumors of natural espers known as

Gemstones. Kuruwa may have been trying to create a new ninja group out of those people.

Strictly speaking, ninja were scientific people, and unlike Hanzou, Kuruwa was aiming to create a flashy, extravagant, and pure ninja group. With that goal, a unit made up only of Gemstones must have sounded pretty appealing.

However, that wasn't what made Hanzou frown.

He held the list of Gemstones in his hand and thought,

…*Why does Kuruwa have a classified Academy City document?*

She was a ninja descendant, but it had taken her almost half a year to corner Hanzou. She may have specialized in blending into the background and mixing in with a group, but he didn't think she had the ability to gather information from a wide area.

Whoever prepared this list was using Kuruwa to do something. But who? And what were they after?

He thought for a bit, but couldn't come up with an answer.

…*What is happening in this city?*

The sound of the report being crumpled came from Hanzou's hand.

Chapter 19: Shining Gemstones and Blood-Stained Rights. The Second Friday of October.

It pissed her off that every single member of Academy City's board of directors was rich.

The genius girl Kumokawa Seria placed her fingers on her temple as she looked around at Kaizumi Tsugutoshi's personal home theater.

The domed room he called his home theater looked out of place for a personal residence and was made with acoustics in mind. Speakers were spread 360 degrees around the room and every gap in the wall was filled with them. There was even a speaker on the back of the door.

"An acquaintance of mine is a conductor," said the old man wearing formal clothes that would have fit in more in an antique setting, "so I wanted to make something that would make even a live performance enthusiast jealous and, before I knew it, I had this. My wife and my daughter were shocked, too."

"I don't really care, but you must need a special kind of music media to use all of these speakers."

"Well, yes. The sound quality is wonderful, but each song costs about twenty million yen."

"Go to hell," spat out Kumokawa as she looked over to the theater's giant monitor. This was no cheap projector; it was a super high density display. The money spent on the display could have been used to buy an entire movie theater including the land it was on.

Displayed on the screen wasn't some huge hit of a movie that was forgotten a year after it opened.

It was a boring man’s face.

Kumokawa sat down in a leather-covered chair so soft she felt like she could have fallen into an eternal sleep in it, reached over to the drink on the side table, and looked back to the screen.

“I don’t like this nouveau riche style, but it’s soundproofed which lets us talk in private. …So why don’t you tell us what your complaint is?”

“W-we haven’t done anything we need to make excuses about,” said the large face displayed on the screen. “Explaining it all is a pain, but we aren’t involved in these incidents. Just do some research and you’ll know I’m telling the truth. The entire chain of events happened naturally without our even knowing.”

“I see,” said Kaizumi as he placed his hands on the back of Kumokawa’s chair.

“So you’re saying you had no part in the sudden and simultaneous targeting of Gemstones for research samples in France, India, Austria, Thailand, Argentina, and elsewhere?”

“Yes.” The man on the screen nodded. “In the past we created and implemented projects such as the Stargate Project thinking we could seriously use espers for military purposes. But this is different. Look into the origins of each of the organizations and you’ll know I’m telling the truth. They aren’t connected and they weren’t created from our investments.”

“True enough.”

Kumokawa took a sip of a pink liquid through a straw and looked over to the documents sitting on the side table like a fruit garnish. They were the investigation reports on the organizations that were after the Gemstones.

“Academic organizations, scientific thought groups, sports engineering groups, and even some peculiar human trafficking organizations. It’s true that there is no proof that this is a network you created, and I can’t imagine you would be backing them.”

“Of course we aren’t. Just because the CIA is well known doesn’t mean we’re behind every conspiracy in the world.”

“Yes, yes. By the way, I have a question for you.” Kumokawa tossed the documents aside. “In each one of these academic organizations, scientific thought groups, sports engineering groups, and peculiar human trafficking organizations, there are two CIA spies. Why is that?”

“!?”

“Did you really think we wouldn’t notice? You have a network between these independent organizations and they don’t even know it. …But why? I doubt the leader of your country approves of this method.”

The man on the screen started talking on about something, but Kumokawa cut the connection without listening.

Kaizumi looked down at Kumokawa’s head.

“What do you think?”

“Well,” responded Kumokawa as she shook her glass causing the ice inside to lightly spin around. “We don’t need to worry about the individual organizations. No matter how much they tinker with those Gemstones, they aren’t going to gain the techniques needed to actually develop psychic powers. They’ll just fail, so we can leave them alone.”

“…”

“But the Stargate group is obtaining the information on all those failures and bringing it together. And failures are the seeds of success. If they refer to the data on countless failures to create an outline, they may be able to succeed.”

“What are the odds of that?”

“Hmm…” responded Kumokawa sluggishly. “0%. We don’t need to worry about it.”

Kaizumi sighed at her blunt response.

It was not a sigh of relief; it was a sigh of exasperation. He had most likely predicted her response.

Kumokawa continued.

“Even with all that, they’ll fail. They don’t know how to use all the data they gathered, so they’ll end up at a standstill. But as long as they don’t realize they have failed, they will continue to use up the Gemstones.”

“I see. My trifling fears are gone now,” was Kaizumi Tsugutoshi’s short initial response. “Now let’s get down to the real issue at hand. What are we going to do from now on?”

“Heh. You’re as naïve as ever.”

“I know that each individual organization and group will fail on their own, but I don’t like that the Gemstones will be used up. …No, let’s stop referring to them as Gemstones. The ones in danger here are just kids who happen to have a certain ability.”

The capture operations could have already begun. If they wanted to safely shelter the children known as Gemstones, they had to settle this before each group’s “research” began. These groups referred to themselves as “research institutions”, but their cumulative knowledge of developing psychic powers was close to zero. Their assumptions and preconceptions might even lead them to dissect the Gemstones and put them in formaldehyde the second they were captured.

“I’m pretty sure I already answered that question,” said Kumokawa in a voice that showed how little she cared. “There are only around 50 Gemstones. On the other hand, there are countless eccentric scientists after them. As such, it would be faster to take care of the Gemstones themselves.”

“…”

“Invite them to Academy City. Taking them in is the most efficient method. You said something about those kids having lives of their own, and, in the end, you didn’t do anything. It was your kindness that forestalled you.”

“I admit I was at fault,” said Kaizumi in a stiff voice. “And now I have an impossible order for you, my brain. What exactly should we do? They are using the Gemstone list that the CIA prepared via different routes than ours to begin ‘mining’ the children nearby. Even if we dispatch Academy City people, we

can’t make it in time to stop the ‘mining’ taking place simultaneously across the world. How are we supposed to stop that?”

“It’s true that we wouldn’t make it if we only dispatched people from Academy City. Even with supersonic passenger planes, there are still geographic limits.”

“However,” Kumokawa added, “the situation changes if we use the organizations around the world that work with Academy City. If they can all act at once around the world, so can we.”

“You make it sound simple,” said Kaizumi expressing his disapproval. “You say they work with us, but it’s nothing much. Most of them are basically companies we make business deals with and groups we supply with resources. There are fewer than ten organizations we work with that have a military side fit for leaving something like this to. It would be impossible for them to immediately gather up the around 50 Gemstones.”

In Academy City’s modern society that relied on science, almost everything was controlled indirectly, but that indirectness caused the execution of orders to be slow and lessened the ability for adaptation. There was no nice, convenient card that let them send troops all over the world that very instant.

“That may be true on the surface.”

“?”

“I don’t like owing people favors, but we should just bow down and ask that frog to help us.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Oh,” Kumokawa sipped the rest of her drink through the straw and smiled before continuing. “I’m just going to have some girls with identical faces fight for us.”

Chapter 20: How to Respond to a Number of Simultaneous Tragedies. *The Second Friday of October.*

It was time for the periodic reports.

“'Galashiels, UK, Higher Contact Society. Misaka has suppressed the fourth, eighth, and thirteenth domes,' reports Misaka #17000.”

“'Lausanne, Switzerland, World Intellectual Club. Misaka has taken out an armed guard,' says Misaka #18022 as she provides her confirmation.”

“'Guadalajara, Mexico, Sixth Sense Headquarters. Misaka has blown up the main entrance to the research building,' says Misaka #14333 as she heads further in.”

“'Deseado, Argentina, Human Sports Analysis Center. Misaka has finished taking control of the secure electronic lock,' says Misaka #15110 as she opens the route to the secret area.”

“'Davao, Philippines, Humanity’s Wisdom Headquarters. Misaka discovered an escape boat and is going to take care of it beforehand,' says Misaka #10090 as she begins her attack.”

Ksshh…

…Kssshhhhh… *Kssssshhhh…*

Kssssshhhhh… *Kssshhh*

“'Ahmednagar, India, Blueprint of the Gods Headquarters. Misaka has destroyed Blocks A, D, and L,' says Misaka #12053 as she continues her work.”

“'Beijing, China, Human Evolution Committee. An attack helicopter has

appeared,' says Misaka #19009 as she sighs.”

“'La Paragua, Venezuela, Special Energy Laboratory. Misaka has succeeded in destroying 80% of the research equipment,' says Misaka #11899 as she is chased by unending work.”

“'Moosonee, Canada, Universe of the Heart Research Room. Misaka has succeeded in cutting all power, including the emergency generators,' reports Misaka #16836 in the darkness.”

“'Salzburg, Austria, International Superior Gene Bank. Misaka has spotted a white kitty, but it’s hardly the time for that,' says Misaka #10501 as she reluctantly returns to the battle.”

Thud!!

Slam! *Bang bang!!*

Boom!!

“'Antarctica, Extraterrestrial Chaos Observatory. Misaka has met some resistance,' says Misaka #19900 as she fights back.”

“'Chiang Mai, Thailand, OOPArt History Archives. If this is all, Misaka can handle it on her own,' says Misaka #12083 as she gives her assessment of the situation.”

“'Starogard, Poland, Anti-Electromagnetic Wave Relief Committee. It seems this is the last bit of resistance,' says Misaka #10855 in a plain report.”

“'Faenza, Italy, Wings to the Future Core. All of the tanks are making this a bit difficult,' says Misaka #17203 dejectedly.”

“'Logroño, Spain, Precise Micro Faith Association. Some assassins who seem to be former soldiers have appeared,' says Misaka #19488 as she takes them out with a swift attack.”

Crash!!

Boom!! *Bang bang bang bang!!*

Roooooar!!

“'Gunsan, South Korea, Leading Edge Science Laboratory. Misaka has restrained all of the main researchers,' reports Misaka #15327.”

“'Angoulême, France, National Oneiromancy Analysis Laboratory. Someone has just commented that Misaka will regret this one day,' says Misaka #13072 as she blows them away anyway.”

“'Codajás, Brazil, World Awakening Alliance. Misaka is leaving the restrained ringleaders for someone else to deal with and hurrying on,' says Misaka #17403 as she steps foot in the deepest area.”

“'Zacapa, Guatemala, Brain Distribution Clarification Center. As there is no resistance, Misaka is about to seize the Gemstone,' says Misaka #10050 as she heads for the Seventh Research Building.”

“'Salzgitter, Germany, Paranormal Inquiry Encyclopedia. Misaka has discovered a hidden door,' says Misaka #10840 as she peers inside.”

Creak…

Step… *Step…*

Squeak squeak

“'Celje, Slovenia, New Energy Mining Agency. Misaka has found a Gemstone,' reports Misaka #12481.”

“'Bergen, Norway, Proof for Miracles. Misaka has also found a Gemstone,' reports Misaka #18072.”

“'Rovaniemi, Finland, Ecliptic Access Line Diffusion Committee. Misaka has begun protecting the Gemstone,' says Misaka #19348 as she stretches out her hand.”

“'Sydney, Australia, UMA Ability Clarification Club. Misaka has confirmed a path of escape and is leaving the facility with the Gemstone,' says Misaka #17009 as she begins to move.”

“'Bragança, Portugal, Seventh Age Weapon Laboratory. Misaka’s escape was a success, and she has guaranteed the safety of the Gemstone,' says Misaka #15113 as she takes a short rest.”

“'No, it is too soon to relax,' says Misaka #10032 in an emergency report!!”

“'? Isn’t #10032 in Academy City?' asks Misaka #14014.”

“'Why is there an emergency report coming from there?' asks Misaka #18829 in a request for an explanation.”

“'There is an intruder. A single intruder.

The intruder’s target seems to be Academy City’s strongest Gemstone, the seventh Level 5,' says Misaka #10032 in a supplementary report!!”

Kssh…

Ksshhh… ssshhh… sshhh…

Kkkkkssssssssssssssshhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhssssssssshhhhhh!!

Chapter 21: Those with an Undetermined Identity.
The Second Friday of October.

The scene was a strange one.

In a container storage area in District 11, around nine girls had collapsed next to a line of giant metal boxes. The girls' clothes, hairstyles, heights, physiques, and even faces were all identical. They were the Sisters who had been created from the cells of a certain Level 5.

Rifles were on the ground, empty shells were scattered about, and the girls were on the ground unconscious. One man was standing amidst it all.

He was unscathed.

The man who should have become a Magic God, Ollerus, took in the nighttime scenery, and his eyes narrowed slightly.

This man was so powerful that the entire magic side was after him, yet he had managed to crush every single one of his pursuers. He had not faced defeat even in the headquarters of the science side, Academy City.

"Wow, this is pretty amazing," came a sudden voice.

A boy was standing a bit away from the collapsed girls. He was #7, Sogiita Gunha: Academy City's seventh Level 5, and also a true man of love and guts.

His face showed displeasure for the scene before him.

But that was not because of the existence of nine girls with the same face.

Sogiita was not bothered by such trivial things.

"…These nine gorgeous girls… I guess that's what I'd call them. Well, anyway, you seem pretty pleased with yourself for mercilessly beating up some girls.

Amazing. I’ve never seen someone with less guts.”

“I have my reasons.”

Ollerus smiled slightly.

He slowly turned his head to look at #7.

“If Academy City was just going to gather up the estimated fifty Gemstones in the world, I wouldn’t stop them, but there is a risk that they'll use them for some unknown kind of research here.”

With the irregular method with which the Gemstones had been invited to Academy City, they were a rare existence for Academy City's scientists. It was possible that some perverted scientist would imprison them in some dark laboratory.

“I thought I should give them a warning. It’s not quite as vague as having a check on them; it’s more like a forceful negotiation. If I can just easily defeat the strongest Gemstone who is also #7 in Academy City, that should be enough. That should get across to *him* what I plan to do if anything happens to the Gemstones while they're here.”

“Heh…” #7 smiled slightly. “Excellent. Now that’s a line with some guts in it. So, you’re negotiating with the darkest depths of Academy City by basically picking a fight with them for the sake of only fifty kids. And you’re going to physically clash with a Level 5 to do it. Good, good. That’s a spirit with quite a bit of guts in it.”

“But you know,” said Sogiita after remaining silent for a moment, “I don’t know who these girls are, yet they risked their lives to put up a fight full of guts. They may have even been fighting to protect me, someone they had never even spoken to.”

“…”

“I don’t have any real reason to risk my life here, but I’ll show some guts. And as such… I’m going to truly crush you.”

The action #7 took immediately thereafter was simple.

He rushed up to Ollerus, grabbed his face, and threw him against the nearby wall of containers.

However, what would happen if that series of actions was done at twice the speed of sound?

A tremendous noise rang out.

The steel containers were easily crushed, and Ollerus’s body flew through the mountain of containers and a few dozen meters beyond it after he slipped from Sogiita’s grasp. The mountain of containers collapsed like a house of cards and rained down on top of Sogiita and the collapsed girls, but after he raised his hands above his head, the containers were blown upwards in midair like a volcano.

Dust enveloped the area.

An ominous metallic clattering continued irregularly for some time.

Then, #7 narrowed his eyes.

“Tch. Your guts may be rotten, but you certainly are showing some warped guts.”

“No, I really have no guts,” said a voice from within the dust.

A silhouette could be seen where the sound had come from, and Ollerus slowly walked forward.

He hadn’t changed even slightly. Not one hair was out of place.

“But I have my reasons. Unlike you, I have a reason to fight.”

“…”

#7 didn't respond.

Sogiita tried to approach Ollerus in order to drive some guts into the gutless man before him.

That was when Ollerus showed the true value of his own power.

Simply put, it was an unexplainable phenomenon.

Even Sogiita who received the attack couldn't even slightly understand what had happened to him.

Before he realized it, he had been blown away a great distance. His entire body, from the surface to his very core, had received damage equally. The shock didn't just come from one spot and spread from there; it was more like an unnatural force had permeated his entire body like a cloth being dunked in water.

“…?”

After receiving that clean hit, strength left his legs, and he collapsed to the ground. Even so, the only thing in Sogiita Gunha’s mind was not fear, but a flood of questions.

He didn’t even let himself feel any danger to his life from Ollerus’s attack.

“The most fearsome attack in this world is an unexplainable power,” spoke the man who should have become a Magic God. “No matter what kind of mysterious power your attack uses, if you swing it down like a sword, it can be stopped as if it were a sword. If you shoot it like a gun, it can be blocked as if it were a gun. Any kind of unknown attack that can be understood is pretty much the same.”

“Ghhh.”

#7 attempted to stand up from his face-down position.

Ollerus didn't move.

He didn't make a single action that was explainable or understandable.

He merely caused some phenomenon, and Sogiita’s body was blown back even further.

“But an unexplainable power cannot be dealt with the same way,” Ollerus spoke slowly and quietly. “The most fearsome thing in this world is to be defeated by an attack that uses an unexplainable power and comes from an incomprehensible place while you have no way of thinking up a countermeasure. The attack is so vague that you can't assign conditions to it, and you don’t even know if there's a direction you can go to avoid it or if you can escape its reach after getting tens of thousands of kilometers away. You now know how horrible that is firsthand.”

Sogiita didn't voice any surprise.

It may have been incomplete, but he had taken two direct hits from Ollerus’s Hliðskjálf. That legendary throne did not actually have any attack functionality, but that was exactly why Ollerus’s spell had evolved to something unexplainable when he forcibly used it as one. Hliðskjálf’s attack was a vague thing that didn't have a defined range or force, so #7 had most likely already lost consciousness from being on the receiving end of it.

“There is no major difference between us,” muttered Ollerus as he relaxed. “One of us is aware that he wields an unexplainable power, and the other isn’t: that is the only real difference between us. You are the delicate yet complex #7 that not even Academy City's researchers could do anything about. In fact, you’re a special esper that they aren’t even sure should really be classified as a Level 5. If you yourself understood that, you may have been able to defeat me.”

The objective of the man who should have become a Magic God was to defeat #7 with overwhelming power.

It was a slight check on Academy City's gathering of the Gemstones.

Ollerus decided that he had accomplished his goal, and silently turned around.

“I did have a reason for not letting myself lose. It may have been unfortunate for you, but just accept your defeat. This isn’t a problem that can be dealt with using guts.”

Then…

“…Now that’s a comment I can’t just let go.”

A presence stood up.

Ollerus slowly turned around once more. A boy was standing there, wounds covering his body. He had received the unknown attack of Hliðskjálf twice and should have lost consciousness, yet he stood up. Ollerus had not seen this coming. However, this was the world Ollerus lived in.

“Don’t treat people like they have no guts before they’ve given up, you bastard.”

Blood was oozing from his forehead.

His breathing was erratic.

But #7 ignored the pain, and stared at Ollerus.

“I won’t be defeated so easily. I’ll show you that being arrogant and full of yourself isn’t the only kind of strength! Guts aren’t something you lose just because you’re at a disadvantage!!”

An unknown power wrapped itself around Sogiita Gunha.

“I’ll show you what true guts are!! You don’t need some great reason. A man who isn’t twisted or rotten, even if he’s a complete stranger, can stand up for some injured girls!!”

#7 ran forward with the momentum of the power gushing forth.

Unlike Ollerus’s unexplainable power, anyone could understand his simple approach.

Ollerus smiled in response.

As he smiled, he took no action that was explainable or understandable.

The third instance of Hliðskjálf, and the seventh Level 5.

Those two inexpressible, inexplicable, and incomprehensible monsters clashed.

And…

Chapter 22: The Conclusion Cannot Be Grasped Individually. *The Second Friday of October.*

A cold sweat was pouring from George Kingdom's body.

During the Cold War, he had (unofficially) been the leader of the Stargate Project to develop psychic powers in a certain country. That project had failed, but he was still rumored to be a skilled person who was behind various different projects. He was in charge of those projects both because the CIA could freely control him and because his value was legendary.

However, he was cornered now.

It was odd. He thought he had prepared for every possible circumstance, but reality had slipped through the cracks and brought it all to an unthinkable conclusion. There had been over fifty research groups that all had independent financial backing and different methods of being funded. All of them had simultaneously seized Gemstones all over the world, yet all at once, someone had destroyed them and the projects they were working on before any progress could be made.

The word "self-protection" floated into the back of his mind.

All those projects had been carried out under each organization's individual judgment, and they had all resulted in great losses without a single result. The Senate wasn't going to let George get away with this one. He wouldn't just lose his ability to act; he would lose his life.

However, there was something other than fear filling George's head.

What…?

A question.

He didn’t need to ask who it was that had physically stopped his project. It wasn’t as if the people who had attacked each organization simply hadn’t been seen. He had received the final reports from the spies in each place.

What happened…?

He had a question beyond that.

The operation had been top-secret. Only George Kingdom himself had all of the information; that was why George was the only one in the operation that was asking this question.

How had girls who looked exactly the same attacked simultaneously all across the world?

A small bit of static sounded in his ear. He had only given his radio frequency to his closest associates, and all of them had been taken out in the attack.

“Are you done sorting everything out? It’s pretty underhanded to not even give you a trial. I’m sure someone who lives in the dark side is well aware of what it means to make an enemy of an entire country.”

“Kumokawa…”

George was dumbfounded at hearing the voice of the brain of the board of directors.

He simply asked a question, forgetting to even be angry.

“Don’t tell me you people… mass-produced those…”

“Yup, that’s it,” responded the genius girl Kumokawa Seria cheerfully. “Cloning humans from cells is against international law, and more importantly, making those girls take military action was an unnecessary risk. I owe someone for that, so I thought I should at least help take care of the aftermath.”

“…”

George Kingdom had a feeling that he had set foot somewhere he shouldn’t have. He was currently standing inside a special facility that could function as a

shelter, but that didn’t ease his mind at all. Ever since ancient times, the fate of fools who touched something they shouldn’t have was always the same.

He heard a small footstep.

“Really… I finally make my super return and they have me taking care of some fat old man who’s super misunderstanding things. Well, once I’m done here, I can go watch a super movie. I’ll have a festival of minor movies that aren’t released in Japan.”

He heard a young female voice.

George Kingdom did not turn around.

Before he could send a signal to the muscles in his neck, it was already over.

#7, Sogiita Gunha, lay collapsed on the ground with obvious wounds all over his body.

He was lying face-up, staring at the starry sky.

The intense fighting had left its mark on the area. One side of the mountain of containers had collapsed, the asphalt had been ripped up, and in some places, the ground itself had split and was rising up like a cliff.

Even after doing all that, he hadn’t been able to win.

During that fight, the man who should have become a Magic God had been above Sogiita Gunha.

Wow…

He had been beaten down with an overwhelming power, yet his eyes were filled with a pure light. It was the light of hope. The world was still overflowing with ridiculous monsters, and there were plenty of things he didn’t know about. The world was vast. That was the honest feeling wrapped around #7. It was obvious, but the world was vast.

The world is filled with amazing people.

#7 hadn’t been up to it this time. And most likely, that man who should have become a Magic God had been holding back. It had felt like he was playing around. #7 had faced him with all his might, but the man had easily dealt with it, and then spared his life to boot.

It had been overwhelming.

Sogiita Gunha understood that truth as he stared up at the starry sky, and then he slowly stood up.

It was much like the action of someone waking from a midday nap.

He spoke as he raised his hands and slowly stretched.

“Now then... I need to renew my guts and train myself all over again.”

A single vaguely defined road stretched along an Arizona desert.

A man holding a cell phone was sitting on the hood of a parked off-road car.

It was Misaka Tabigake.

He was the man who led the world in a better direction without relying on violence by proposing what it was the world lacked.

“It seems something rather troublesome happened.”

“It is just the usual violence. It was nothing that required you.”

“True enough. I don’t use that kind of method. I can come up with at least three more peaceful methods off the top of my head.”

“It is a matter of cost. It depends on the situation, but this time, a violent method was cheaper.”

“What a boring reason.” Misaka sighed, and picked up the coffee cup sitting on the hood. “So, now the small bits of possibility that were spread out around the

world have been gathered up by Academy City. They didn't have much of a chance to begin with, but now pretty much every hint towards successfully developing psychic powers has been cut off. You really are the only one that profited from this."

Misaka smiled, and took a sip of the bitter liquid before continuing.

"By the way, there's something I wanted to check with you about regarding that violence."

"What is it?"

"Those areas were pretty chaotic, so people's accounts of what happened aren't too reliable, which is why I'm just 'checking'. Academy City *is* a city of espers, though, so maybe there's someone who can make copies of herself or some monster who can teleport hundreds of thousands of kilometers."

"…"

"Anyway, I've heard that identical-looking girls were spotted near the estimated fifty research facilities all over the world."

Misaka Tabigake's manner of speech changed.

It wasn't a change due to a wave of emotions, but there was definitely a change.

"As I said before, the eyewitness accounts can't be relied on, and Academy City is a city of espers. Even if something that seems contradictory happens, you can just say that there was actually a special power behind it, and the conversation ends there."

"I will leave this one to your imagination. However, I will tell you this much: this is not a problem you need to worry about."

"I see," responded Misaka.

He then asked a further question.

"…So, are you also saying that I shouldn't worry about the information saying that the girls who were spotted resembled my daughter?"

“…Hrm.”

“Hey, Aleister. If you say I don’t have to worry about it, then fine; after all, I can’t trust what you say in the first place. But there’s one thing you need to keep in mind: if you do anything to my wife or daughter, what do you think will happen once I find out? Do you know what it means to make an enemy of a mere father? Think about those things.”

“How would you do it?” Aleister’s voice asked a simple question. “How would a normal freelancer attack the chairman of Academy City’s board of directors?”

“It’s true that there may not be anything in this world that can take you out in one blow,” admitted Misaka Tabigake. “However, my job is to point out what it is this world lacks. If the world is lacking such a thing, then the ball’s in my court; that's why I gave you that warning. So, keep that in mind.”

The conversation between the two adults was over.

After that dangerous exchange, they both slipped back into the darkness of the world.

Silvia was vacuuming the apartment’s hallway.

Most of the kids a certain idiot had brought in had been taken in by churches or had found a new life with foster parents, but a few remained in the apartment. This was not because no one was willing to take them in; the children themselves wanted to wait for that certain idiot to return.

She sighed.

Why was she here? Her extended overseas training to polish her skills as a Bonne Dame was over, and the United Kingdom had ordered her to return again and again. She wasn’t getting paid, and she wasn’t doing it out of a traditional master-and-servant relationship. She earned her own living expenses, so there was no real reason tying her to this particular apartment. Now that the idiot had left, there was no real meaning in staying. Returning to England or moving to a nicer place would have been the better option, but Silvia simply did not feel any urge to leave the apartment.

Her reason was a silly one.

She refused to put it in words because it was too ridiculous.

When Silvia sighed again, she spotted something. She brushed her hair, put down the vacuum cleaner, and headed for the entryway. She opened the door like always, and said the same thing as always.

“Hey, welcome back, you dumb bastard.”

Afterword

To those who have read through the books one at a time: welcome back.

To those who read through all of the books at once: welcome.

This is Kamachi Kazuma.

This is SS2!! I wrote these stories as events that weren't in the main story but are nice to know. I wonder how well I did. I think this one displayed the world of the series from all sorts of angles with the magic side, the science side, and even the normal side.

The overall theme was the passing of the days and months, and the key word was Gemstone.

Surprisingly, this volume takes place over almost an entire year.

The story of the Gemstones was completed here in SS2, but those who have read to the end must be wondering about some things; for example, "Is the Gemstone story really complete?" or "Why wasn't that person collected with the others?" You're right to ask those things because, while the Gemstone storyline was solely in SS2, there are other storylines that haven't been declared yet. It may be fun to speculate about various things.

Oh, right. About the two people with the highest rank who appeared in this volume. Those two are basically the kind of characters who are against the rules in this kind of battle story. As for why, well… they have no real battle procedure. I suppose there is the forceful approach of going with a great frontal attack of power that exceeds the total amount of unexplainable power, though.

Speaking of unusual people, there were two ninja in this volume. This world does have that area and that kind of angle in it. The ninja here ended up having a confusing talk about the ways in which ninja are not the same as samurai and what to do about it. It might be fun to look further into their story, but that might

be difficult because they are characters with a subtle rule about staying side characters. In a way, they're further below the surface than the magicians.

Personally, I feel that the strongest character this time was Misaka Papa, but what did you think? He is from yet another section that is separate from the main Index series, and he changes the world via means other than battles. That said, it isn't that he doesn't fight; he just has a different way of fighting. He isn't the kind of good person who denies fighting itself. He rashly interferes with the foundations of society, so he might be even more dangerous than the children who merely clench their fists and punch each other.

Also, one person who could oppose Misaka Papa is Kamijou Touya. Those dandies have their own way of fighting. Well, one of them is a corporate warrior who's never promoted and is even used by his own subordinates, and the other leaves the finances to his wife, so they're rather difficult dandies.

…Come to think of it, if you follow SS Volume 1 to Volume 2, you will be astonished to see how little they are connected. I suppose you can just barely make a connection with the destruction of Skill-Out. It makes me want to make fun of myself for saying the two SS volumes are a "series", but I felt it would be more interesting to do away with that kind of definition and restraint in order to make it a stage where anything could happen. As such, if a third volume ever comes out, I'm betting the connections between SS volumes will fade even more.

Many thanks to my illustrator Haimura-san and my editor, Miki-san. The setting kept changing, which made this difficult, not to mention how many chapters there were, so thank you for sticking with it.

I would also like to thank all the readers. Thank you for reading this SS that I started solely on the idea of destroying the theory that each volume ends after a short period of time.

And now you will be closing the page.

I pray that you will be able to open the cover of the next volume.

And I will lay down my pen for now.

A lot is happening that Kamijou-chan doesn't know about, you know?

-Kamachi Kazuma

Toaru Majutsu no Index — SS2

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